



SREENARAYANAGURU  
OPEN UNIVERSITY

# History of Kerala up to 1800 A.D.

## Postgraduate Programme in History



# SELF LEARNING MATERIAL

COURSE CODE: M21HS02DC

## SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

## **Vision**

*To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.*

## **Mission**

To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

## **Pathway**

Access and Quality define Equity.

# History of Kerala up to 1800 A.D.

Course Code: M21HS02DC

Semester-I

## Master of Arts History Self Learning Material



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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

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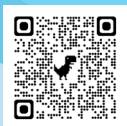
History of Kerala up to 1800  
A.D.



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## Message from Vice Chancellor

Dear

I greet all of you with deep delight and great excitement. I welcome you to the Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University was established in September 2020 as a state initiative for fostering higher education in open and distance mode. We shaped our dreams through a pathway defined by a dictum 'access and quality define equity'. It provides all reasons to us for the celebration of quality in the process of education. I am overwhelmed to let you know that we have resolved not to become ourselves a reason or cause a reason for the dissemination of inferior education. It sets the pace as well as the destination. The name of the University centers around the aura of Sreenarayanaguru, the great renaissance thinker of modern India. His name is a reminder for us to ensure quality in the delivery of all academic endeavors.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University rests on the practical framework of the popularly known "blended format". Learner on distance mode obviously has limitations in getting exposed to the full potential of classroom learning experience. Our pedagogical basket has three entities viz Self Learning Material, Classroom Counselling and Virtual modes. This combination is expected to provide high voltage in learning as well as teaching experiences. Care has been taken to ensure quality endeavours across all the entities.

The university is committed to provide you stimulating learning experience. The PG programme in History is expected to expose the learners to the intricacies of historian's craft through modules on historiography and historical methods. The learners will be trained on the skills for understanding historical forces enabling them to move further in to the complexities of historical narration in order to revisit history with the right perspective. The modules derived multi-disciplinary flavour due to their cross border penetration. We assure you that the university student support services will closely stay with you for the redressal of your grievances during your studentship.

Feel free to write to us about anything that seems relevant regarding the academic programme.

Wish you the best.



Regards,

Dr. P.M. Mubarak Pasha

01.03.2023

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# Region, Historical Traditions and Early History

**BLOCK-01**



# Landscape and Historical Consciousness

## Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ♦ understand the physiological features of Kerala
- ♦ evaluate the historical consciousness
- ♦ provide an insight into the past from Travancore history and Zamorins of Calicut
- ♦ enquire into the sources of Kerala history

## Background

The unit provides an introduction to the history of Kerala, focusing on its physical characteristics, distinct regions, and unique attributes that set Kerala apart. Writers of Kerala history have made efforts to uncover unexplored aspects of Kerala's past. Both oral and written sources have contributed to the exploration of our rich historical tradition. This unit also discusses the recent developments in understanding and interpreting Kerala's past.

## Keywords

Topography, Historical Consciousness, Prehistoric Culture, Megalithic Age, Tamilakam, Archaeological Excavations, Trade Relations, Indian Ocean

## Discussion

### 1.1.1 Geographical Settings

Kerala, with an area of 38,864 square kilometres, is located between 74° 52' and 77° 22' east longitude and 8° 18' and



- ◆ *A narrow Coastal strip*

12° 48' north latitude. It is bordered on the east by the Western Ghats, a geological escarpment running northwest to southeast parallel to the coast. On the west, it is bounded by the Arabian Sea, on the south by the state of Tamil Nadu, and on the north by the state of Karnataka. The geography of Kerala, situated on the southern edge of the Western Ghats, is asymmetrical. Its elevation ranges from below sea level to 2,694 metres above sea level, and its landform is characterized by rolling hills and steep slopes. Due to its location and varying altitude, Kerala has diverse agro ecological conditions. The state can be divided into three distinct elevation zones: lowland, midland, and highland regions.

### Highland

- ◆ *Cultivation-plantation crops*

The highland region is characterized by several steep hill ranges. This area is covered in forests and is drained by small streams. In this region, dense forests are found in the higher ranges, while plantations are scattered across the lower ranges. The soil depth and texture vary significantly. In the highlands, crops such as tea, coffee, rubber, and cardamom are grown.

### Midland

- ◆ *Isolated hills, plains valleys*

The midland region of Kerala has elevations ranging from 7.5 to 75 metres above sea level, mainly consisting of valleys. Approximately 42 percent of the area is comprised of gently to moderately sloping regions and valleys with flat terrain. The landscape is characterized by various rivers, small hills, and valleys, creating an undulating terrain. The predominantly lateritic soil supports the cultivation of a variety of seasonal, annual, and perennial crops. Crops such as paddy, tapioca, spices, cashew, pepper, rubber, ginger, turmeric, tea, and cardamom are cultivated in this region.

### Lowland

- ◆ *Coastal plain*

The lowland area, which constitutes approximately 10% of the total area, extends along the coastal strip bordering the Arabian Sea. The elevation of this region varies from almost flat to gently sloping. It is characterized by marine features, including beach ridges, beaches with lagoons, and wetlands. The lowlands are particularly known for their backwaters, which are surrounded by extensive rice fields and coconut plantations.



## Ghats, Passes and Coastline

- ◆ Sea ports commercial and cultural contacts
- ◆ Passes immigration

The Western Ghats, with elevations ranging from 3,000 to 8,000 feet above sea level, and the uninterrupted coastline have led historians to consider Kerala as a geographically isolated part of the subcontinent. However, some historians believe that Kerala had external contact opportunities due to the Palakkad Ghats and strategic seaboard. Anamudi, located in the Western Ghats, is the highest peak in peninsular India, while Kuttanadu represents the lowest land. The Palaghat Gap, an unbroken wall of high mountains, served as a major trade route in ancient Kerala and also influenced the climate of the region. The Chola dynasty expanded their power in Kerala through this gap, and Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan also conducted raids using this passage. Other passes include the Thamarassery Pass, connecting to Mysore, and the Periya Gap, leading to Coorg. Similarly, Kerala and its neighboring state, Tamil Nadu, are connected through passes such as the Bodinaikkanur Pass, Kampam Pass, Ariyankavu Pass, and Aruvamozhi Pass. Kerala's strategic seaboard includes Madaya, Kannur, Kozhikode, Kollam, Kadalundi, Ponani, Kotunkolur, Pattanam, Kochi, and Vizhinjam. Two notable physiographic features of Kerala are Ezhimala in the north and the Varkala Cliff, which extends into the Arabian Sea in the south. Sea ports like *Muziris*, *Tyndis*, *Barace*, and *Nelcynda* facilitated commercial and cultural exchanges in ancient Kerala.

## Rivers

- ◆ Rivers: Cultural and religious activities

The terrain of Kerala is intersected by 44 rivers, all of which flow westward into the Arabian Sea, except for three tributaries of the River Kaveri that flow eastward. The Valapattanam, Chaliyar, and Bharatapuzha are the three major rivers, with Periyar and Pampa both exceeding a length of 200 km. Cultural and religious activities often take place on the banks of these rivers. Mamankam is celebrated on the banks of Bharathapuzha, while Sankaracharya and Sivaratri are observed on the banks of the Periyar. Religious sites such as Aranmula, Maramon, and Edathwa are located along the Pampa River. The terrain of Kerala also features various water bodies, including lakes and backwaters. The Vembanad lake, spanning an area of 160 sq. km between Alappuzha and Cochin, is the largest among them. Other notable lakes in the state include Kayamakulam and Ashtamudi. Sastamkotta lake, located in Kollam, is the only freshwater lake in Kerala.

## Climate and Agriculture

### ◆ Agro-climatic zone

Kerala is located in an agro-climatic zone that experiences significant rainfall, primarily due to the South West and North East monsoon winds. The Idukki district's high ranges receive the highest amount of rainfall in the state. The plains have a hot and humid climate. The discovery of the south-west monsoon by Hippalus, an Egyptian pilot, allowed for direct sea voyages from the Persian Gulf to Muziris. The trade of spices and aromatic plants contributed to the rich flora and fauna of Kerala. Since ancient times, Kerala has been an exporter of pepper, cardamom, ginger, and cinnamon. Foreign countries have also used teak wood from Kerala for shipbuilding purposes. Kerala is abundant in mineral resources, and ancient Romans obtained pearls and diamonds from Kerala in exchange gold.

## Human Settlement

### ◆ First settlement in high ranges

Humans initially settled in the high ranges of Kerala, characterized by red soil hillocks and undulating tracts, around 25,000 years ago. During this time, they lived in various descendant groups with uneven development in terms of technology, economy, socio-culture, and population growth. These groups were primarily confined to the red soil region until the sixth and seventh centuries CE. Between the seventh and eighth centuries CE, it is believed that human adaptation to the water-saturated and waterlogged landscape occurred through the cultivation of paddy fields, which involved draining the water and reclaiming the fertile soil. However, the exact historical details of this reclamation process remain unknown. While it is evident that a significant amount of labor was required, it is impossible to determine who organized the labor force and the specific details of the organizational or institutional framework under which they operated.

### ◆ Political and cultural isolation

The geographical features of Kerala contribute to its political and cultural isolation from the rest of the country. These features also facilitate our extensive and active contacts with the outside world. The distinctive position of Kerala, sandwiched between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea, has significantly influenced its historical development. Unlike North India, Kerala did not experience frequent invasions, and it took a longer time for Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Jainism from the north to establish themselves in Kerala. As a result, Kerala developed its own unique way of life and social institutions without excessive interference from external influences.



### 1.1.2 Myths and Legends

- ◆ Quasi historical works

During the ancient period, Kerala did not exist as a separate political entity; rather, it was part of ancient *Tamizhakam*. Therefore, the ancient history of Kerala is primarily reconstructed based on ancient Tamil classics and relevant archaeological findings. The historical works produced during the medieval and early modern periods in Kerala relied heavily on oral traditions, traditional written records, and legends. As a result, they can be considered quasi-historical or even non-historical by today's standards, particularly because no proper historical works were produced during that time in the society.

#### 1.1.2.1 Parasurama Legend

- ◆ Kerala created by Parasurama

According to legend, the land of Kerala is believed to have been gifted by the Arabian Sea to Parasurama, one of the ten avatars or incarnations of Lord Vishnu. The legend states that Parasurama threw his axe, known as a *parasu*, across the sea from either Gokarna to Kanyakumari or from Kanyakumari to Gokarna (according to another version), and the water receded to the spot where the axe fell. This resulting territory is claimed to be the land of Kerala, also referred to as Bhargava Kshetram or Parasurama Kshetram. It should be noted that the Parasurama tradition has very little historical or factual basis, as Parasurama himself is considered a mythical hero.

- ◆ Historical value doubtful
- ◆ Geographical hints

References to the legend of Parasurama creating Kerala from the sea can be found in Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsa* and in the *Tiruvallangadu* plates from the reign of Rajendra Chola. This legend was passed from one generation to another and eventually documented in the *Keralolpathi*, a Malayalam work of uncertain historical value compiled in the 18th century. Regardless of its historical validity, the Parasurama legend incorporates certain geographical and geological facts related to ancient Kerala. Although geography, as noted by K.M. Panikkar, is "the most permanent and unchanging factor of history," it is widely acknowledged that the geographical features of a country undergo changes over time.

#### 1.1.2.2 St. Thomas Tradition

The St. Thomas legend is associated with the beginning and expansion of Christianity in Kerala. According to this legend, St. Thomas, one of Jesus' apostles, arrived at Maliankara, near Kodungallur, in the year 52 CE and established seven churches in various parts of Kerala. This legend likely originated in the context of the flourishing overseas trade

- ◆ *Origin and spread of Christianity*

between foreign cultures and Kerala during the first century CE. However, it remains a legend as there is no historical evidence to support it.

### 1.1.2.3 Cheraman Perumal Legend

The legend of the conversion of the last Chera Emperor, Cheraman Perumal, to Islam after dividing the country, serves as a dramatic conclusion to the imaginative tale of the foreign perumals. According to the story, the Perumal who left Kerala arrived at a port on the Arabian coast and met the Prophet Muhammad in Jeddah. The legend continues that after being officially recognized by the prophet, he married the sister of the Arabian king and lived comfortably there for five years. Later, he embarked on a journey to Kerala to spread Islam in the country. However, he passed away and was buried on the Arabian coast before he could fulfill his mission. It should be noted that there is no contemporary record or evidence to support the Cheraman legend.

- ◆ *Not corroborated by any records*

None of the early or medieval travellers who visited Kerala referred to the story of Cheraman Perumal's alleged conversion to Islam in their records. Not Sulaiman, Al-Biruni, Benjamin of Tudela, Al Kazwini, Marco Polo, Friar Jordanus, Ibn Batuta, Abdur Razzak, Nicola Conti, none of them mentioned it. According to Dr. Gundert, there was never a Cheraman Perumal. Cheraman is simply the name of the dynasty of the Chera or Kerala rulers, as both names refer to the same rulers. Logan accepted the story of the Perumal's conversion to Islam as true but changed the conversion date from 345 to 825 C.E. He linked it to a rumored tombstone in Zaffar on the Arabian coast, believed to belong to the converted Perumal. However, the existence and contents of the Arabian epitaph mentioned by Logan have been disproven due to lack of reliable evidence. Some scholars believe that the religion to which the last Perumal converted may have been Buddhism or Jainism. Another version suggests that the last Perumal became a convert to Christianity and went on a pilgrimage to Mylapore, where he passed away years later and was buried next to the tomb of St. Thomas, the Apostle.

- ◆ *Debates- religious conversion of Cheraman Perumal*

There is valid reason to reject the legend of the Perumal renouncing Hinduism and dividing the kingdom as it is historically inaccurate. It has been proven that the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries marked the era of the Second Chera Empire, with the Kulasekharas ruling over the entirety



- ◆ No evidence of conversion of last Perumal

of Kerala from their capital in Mahodayapuram. The last Cheraman Perumal was Rama Varma Kulasekhara (1090-1102CE), and there is no evidence to support the claim that he abandoned Hinduism and adopted a non-Hindu faith such as Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, or Christianity. It appears that the Cheraman legend originated from a mistaken identification, confusing a later local ruler, possibly a Zamorin of Calicut who converted to Islam, with an early Chera emperor.

#### 1.1.2.4 Keralolpathi

- ◆ Hotchpotch of legend

The most widely known traditional source for Kerala's history is *Keralolpathi*, an oral tradition passed down by the *Namboodiri Brahmins* of Kerala and compiled in various versions. It was written and consolidated during a much later period, incorporating all the available myths and legends surrounding the origin of the land and the Brahmins. Historians generally believe that the *Keralolpathi* was compiled no earlier than the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Several scholars, including Herman Gundert, Chelangat Achutha Menon, and Manavikrama Raja, have produced their own versions of the book, while maintaining the same underlying theme.

- ◆ Raksha purusha-settlement of disputes

*Keralolpathi* asserts that Kerala was formed by Parasurama, extending from Gokarna in the north to Kanyakumari in the south. According to the legend, Parasurama lifted this land from the Arabian Sea using his legendary axe. The tale of Parasurama appears to have been adapted from the *Brahmanda Purana*. It is said that as an act of repentance for his actions of killing all the *kshatriya* kings, Parasurama hurled his axe across the sea from Gokarna to Kanyakumari, and the land of Kerala emerged. Parasurama then brought sixty-four Brahmin families from North India and allotted them the newly created land. Thirty-two families settled in Tulunadu, and the remaining thirty-two settled in present-day Kerala. *Keralolpathi* goes on to mention that differences of opinion arose among the Kerala Brahmins regarding power-sharing and the appointment of a protector or *Raksha Purusha* to resolve disputes.

The work *Keralolpathi* is divided into three parts. The first part is known as the 'Parasurama period,' which covers the legendary creation of the land and the settlement of the Brahmins in thirty-two grama. The second part is called the 'Perumal period' and lists the invited Perumals who became the ruling kings. The last part is referred to as the 'Tampuran period,' where the respective *naduvazhi* (local ruler) is

- ◆ *Chronology not followed*

portrayed as the blessed recipient of sanction from the last of the Perumals.

The different versions of *Keralolpathi* legitimize the authority of the *Brahmins* over the land of Kerala, their role in creating the rulers, and the relationship of reciprocity between the rulers and the Brahmins. The *Jenmam* rights of the *Namboodiri Brahmins* over the entire land of Kerala in the medieval period were thus justified through a popular tradition created by the *Brahmins* themselves, and other sections of society were made to accept it.
- ◆ *Legitimization of Brahmin dominance*

The fables in the *Keralolpathi* lack chronological order and accountability. It claimed that Krishnadeva Raya, the Vijayanagara king who ascended the throne in 1509 CE, sent the Perumal to Kerala in the year 426 CE. However, it is also stated that the Perumal arrived in Kerala in 428 CE and went to Mecca, where he met Prophet Muhammad in the same year. Prophet Muhammad actually lived in the 7th century CE. The work was compiled by the Namboodiri Brahmins of Kerala during a later period to uphold their social, political, and economic dominance over other societal groups. They included in the compilation only those legends and fables that aligned with their objectives and aspirations, ensuring the preservation of their superiority.
- ◆ *An anonymous work*

**1.1.2.5 Mushikavamsa**

The work *Mushikavamsa* belongs to the “Kavya tradition” of Indian historical studies. It was composed by Atula in the 11th century C.E. and is generally regarded as the earliest historical chronicle of Kerala. Atula served as the court poet of Srikanta, the King of Ezhimala or Mushika in North Kerala during the 11th century. This Sanskrit *mahakavya* consists of over one thousand poems divided into fifteen cantos. Atula relies on legends and traditions to document the early history of the Mushika Kingdom, providing a more factual and historical account.
- ◆ *Mahakavya in Sanskrit, composed by Atula*

The work offers insights into the Chera dynasty’s influence on the Ezhimala Kingdom. Atula provides a chronology of the Mushika rulers from Ramaghata to Srikanta. According to the narrative, the pregnant queen of Mahishamathi sought refuge in Ezhimala following the legendary hero Parasurama’s massacre. She gave birth to Ramaghata, who went on to establish the Mushika kingdom. Since he was believed to be born in a mouse’s burrow, his dynasty became known as Mushika. Ramaghata is credited with building the
- ◆ *History of Mushika Dynasty*

capital city of Kolapattanam. According to Atula, Srikanta is the 118th ruler of the dynasty.

- ◆ *Furnish reliable historical information*

The author mentions several significant kings, including Nandan, Uran, Vikramaraman, Jayamani, and Vallabhan II. The most noteworthy king of the dynasty was Vallabhan II, who founded the ports of Marahi (Madayi) and Valapattanam (valayapattanam). He is said to have aided the Cheras in their conflict against the Cholas. Being a court poet, Atula naturally connects the lineage of his royal patron to the *Yadavakula*, in order to legitimize the power and authority of the Mushika king.

### 1.1.3 Early Historical Writings - Travancore Histories and Zamorins of Calicut

#### 1.1.3.1 Tuhfat-ul-Mujahiddin

- ◆ *Political history of Malabar during the Portuguese period*

*Tuhfat-ul-Mujahiddin*, written by Sheikh Zainuddin in the 16th century, represents a significant development in the tradition of historical writing in Kerala. The book portrays the atrocities committed by the Portuguese on the natives of Malabar, particularly targeting the Muslims. It was widely regarded, including by foreigners, as an honest guide to understanding the history of Malabar. Zainuddin completed the book in 1583. He hailed from Ponnani and came from a family of religious scholars. He dedicated the book to Adil Shah I, the Sultan of Bijapur at that time.

- ◆ *Divided into four parts, which light on the social customs of medieval Kerala*

The work *Tuhfat-ul-Mujahiddin* consists of an introduction and four separate parts. In the introduction, the author urges the Muslims of Malabar to resist the Portuguese dominion in the land. The first part includes relevant verses from the Quran and provides a detailed description of the growth of Islam in Kerala, including the ports along the western coast of the Indian subcontinent. The second part highlights the tolerant attitude of the Hindu rulers in Malabar towards Muslims and other communities. It also discusses various aspects of Hindu customs, the caste system, pollution, marriage practices, order of succession, polyandry, clothing, and warfare prevalent among the people of Malabar. This part offers a vivid portrayal of the socio-cultural conditions in 16th-century Malabar.

The fourth and final part of the book focuses on the Portuguese dominance in Malabar within the broader context

- ◆ Loss of Muslim dominantion in foreign trade

of Kerala, spanning the period from 1498 to 1583. This section presents factual historical information, emphasizing the concern over the loss of Muslim dominance in foreign trade between the Middle East and India. The gradual growth of Portuguese hegemony across various aspects of Kerala society is clearly depicted in *Tuhfat-ul-Mujahiddin*.

### 1.1.3.2 Early Surveyors

- ◆ Information about the people and land

The British authorities, as part of their increasing colonial control over Kerala in the 19th century, initiated the creation of manuals, gazetteers, and survey reports. These documents were prepared by their officials with the aim of gathering historical information about the people and the land under their rule. These works offer valuable insights into the customs, relationships, social systems, and way of life during that period. The authorities assigned capable officers to compile separate manuals for each district, resulting in the creation of individual manuals for certain districts.

- ◆ As Newsletters

Gazetteers and Survey Reports were also compiled during the British era. While Gazetteers served as regular newsletters containing government orders of that time, they also offered valuable information about the land and people of specific regions. The *Malabar District Gazetteer* from 1905, for example, provides comprehensive details about land ownership and the population of the district.

- ◆ Malabar-Joint Commissioners Report of 1792-1793

Several survey reports were published during the British colonial period in Malabar. The first significant report was the *Joint Commissioners Report of 1792-1793*, conducted by appointed commissioners to assess the state and conditions of the province and prepare a report. This marked the British authorities' initial official inquiry in Malabar. According to the report, the *Jenmis* in Malabar were recognized as the landlords by the British government, a decision that had a profound impact on the future history of Kerala, particularly Malabar.

- ◆ History of Malabar-period of British colonialism

Other valuable sources of information about the history of Malabar during British colonialism include *A Journey from Madras* by Francis Buchanan in 1870, the reports of Ward and Conner, the Report of the Settlement of Malabar District in 1900 by Moberly, and the Report of the Madras Tenancy Committee in 1940. These works offer insights into the historical context of Malabar during the British rule.

### 1.1.4 Manuals and Gazetteers



- ◆ Administrative purpose
- ◆ Revenue collection reports

All the gazetteers and survey reports were mainly created for administrative purposes by the British authorities in Kerala. These reports conducted systematic studies on the land and its people throughout their rule. As land tenure and ownership were crucial factors influencing the socio-political and economic conditions of the society, these reports examined the traditional system of revenue collection and provided suggestions for reforms to benefit the colonial administration.

#### 1.1.4.1 William Logan

- ◆ Report of land tenure system

William Logan was initially tasked by the company to study and report on the *Kana-Janma Maryada* and the land tenure system in Malabar. To compile the report, he visited all Districts, except Wayanad, interviewed 4021 individuals, and surveyed 14034 parcels of agricultural land. On June 16, 1882, he submitted his reports. His notable works include the Malabar Manual, a compilation of treatises, agreements, and other important documents concerning British affairs in Malabar. When the Government of Madras decided to create manuals for each district in Kerala, Logan was appointed to write the Madras Manual. The first chapter of the manual explores geography, climate, and the landscape. The second chapter covers religion, caste, language, literature, education, customs, and manners. The third chapter delves into the history of Malabar and its people, dividing the material into indigenous and foreign sources. The indigenous group includes Keralolpathi and Kerala Mahatmyam, while the second group examines foreign documents. Lastly, the fourth chapter addresses issues related to agricultural land ownership, agricultural workers, and agricultural practices. Logan devoted considerable effort to uncovering the cultural history of Kerala, and his work can be regarded as one of the finest independent and unbiased studies on the history of Kerala.

#### 1.1.4.2 Indigenous Initiatives

Kerala did produce works of historical significance during the period spanning the 16th to 19th centuries. One such work is Joseph Kathanar's historical account from the 16th century, which provides insights into the history and customs of Kerala in general. Although it does not specifically focus on the history of the Christian community during that time, it offers valuable cultural information. The growth of colonialism and the introduction of modern education played

- ◆ First book published with the title 'History'

a role in fostering the development of modern historical writing in Kerala. Furthermore, the 19th century witnessed the emergence and expansion of historical literature in the region. The origins of historical writing in Kerala can be traced back to Vaikathu Pachu Muthathu, who published a concise history of Travancore titled *Thiruvoithamkur Charithram* in 1867. This pioneering work was the first book in Kerala to bear the title of 'History.'

### P. Shangunny Menon

Drawing inspiration from Pachu Muthathu, P. Shangunny Menon authored *A History of Travancore from the Earliest Times*, which was published in 1878. This English-language book benefitted from Menon's position as an employee of the king of Travancore, granting him access to various sources for his writing. Consequently, the book reflects a typical court history. It encompasses the dynastic history of Travancore until 1860. While the ancient history of Travancore relies on legends, oral traditions, and fables, the history from the 18th century onwards adopts a more factual approach. It predominantly praises the kings, as Menon sought to glorify Travancore's past achievements, given that the region was under colonial rule during his time. Menon views the 16th and 17th centuries as a progressive period in Travancore's history. Overall, this book holds significance in the realm of historiographical studies of Kerala.

- ◆ History from 18th century become more factual

After the publication of the Malabar Manual, the rulers of Cochin and Travancore were also motivated to create Manuals for their respective states. As a result, the Travancore State Manual, prepared by V. Nagam Ayya, and the Cochin State Manual, prepared by C. Achutha Menon, were published in 1906 and 1911, respectively. Both Nagam Ayya and Achutha Menon extensively relied on *Keralolpathi* versions to document the early history of their states. Additionally, they consulted Portuguese and Dutch records to incorporate the recent history into their works.

- ◆ Compilation of the State Manuals of Travancore and Cochin

### Nagam Ayya

Nagam Ayya gained fame for compiling the Travancore Census Report of 1891 and writing the Travancore State Manual, which was published in three volumes in 1906. The manual comprised 21 chapters and a total of 1821 pages, including a glossary and index, divided into three volumes. Each chapter covered various important subjects related to the state, and in preparing these chapters, several District

- ◆ Travancore State Manuals- 3 volumes



Manuals of Madras were consulted.

◆ *Ist volume-physical features*

In the first volume, Nagam Ayya discusses the physical features of the country, its flora and fauna, in the first four chapters. The fifth chapter focuses on archaeology, covering prehistoric archaeological remains such as sepulchral urns, architecture, sculpture, coins, forts, military works, and monuments. In the sixth chapter, he writes about the legend of Parasurama and the Perumals, the antiquity of Kerala, South India, and Rome, early Greek accounts of Kerala, early missionaries, trade with China, early Muslims, political organization in Malabar, accounts of travelers, internal history from 1444 to 1680 CE, the Portuguese in Malabar and Travancore, the arrival of Francis Xavier, Umayamma Rani, Ettuveetil Pillamar, Marthanda Varma, and other Travancore rulers.

◆ *II<sup>nd</sup> & III<sup>rd</sup> volume-social-economic history*

In the second volume, Nagam Ayya provides an account of social, religious, and cultural history. He discusses Hinduism, Islam, Christianity; Malayalam literature, education, and more. In the third volume, he focuses on agriculture, economic conditions, trade and commerce, means of communication, arts and industries, education, land tenure, land taxes, and other related topics. In the chapter on education (Volume II, pages 443-97), Nagam Ayya presents a history of the educational movement in the state.

◆ *Didn't separate historical and unhistorical facts*

In January 1907, the State Manual, consisting of three large quarto volumes with approximately 200 pages each and numerous illustrations, was issued to the public by the Travancore government. This monumental work received praise from all quarters. The author did not separate historical facts from unhistorical and rational from irrational facts; instead, he entrusted this task to the true historian's genius. According to the author, Parasurama was undoubtedly the leader of the earliest Aryan colony in South-West India. He is said to have established a distinct military caste from his Brahmin colonies to govern this new land. In Volume III of his work, the author delves into the social history of the country, examining the lives of high-caste and lower-caste individuals.

Nagam Ayya wrote about the history of modern education in Travancore but neglected the history of ancient education, possibly due to a lack of available materials. It is important to note that his historical accounts are based solely on available materials. His works represent a significant development

- ◆ *Neglected the ancient education system.*

in the historiography of Kerala, making a substantial contribution to the field and serving as a valuable resource for researchers and history enthusiasts.

### **T.K.Velupillai**

- ◆ *Travancore State Manual in 4 volumes contributed to historiography in Kerala*

T.K. Velupillai was a knowledgeable scholar, a respected advocate, a diligent researcher, and a talented writer and historian. He made a significant contribution to the advancement of historiography in Kerala through the publication of the four-volume *Travancore State Manual*. He also served as the first elected deputy president of the Sri Mulam Assembly. When the Government of Travancore decided to revise the State Manual originally written by V. Nagam Ayya, they entrusted T.K. Velupillai with the task. As the special officer for the revision of the State Manual, he compiled the work with the assistance of Suranad Kunjan Pillai. Some of his notable works include *Hemalatha*, *Sahitya adarsanam*, *Sree Ramayanam*, *Krishirashtram*, *Moonnu Maharajakkanmar*, and *Velu Thampi Dalawa*. However, his most significant work is the four-volume 'Travancore State Manual,' spanning around 400 pages.

- ◆ *Pasarurama and the legend of the formation of Kerala*

In the first volume of the book, he discusses the physical features of Travancore, including its geology, flora, fauna, people, language, religion, castes, Hinduism, Christianity, tribes, and general characteristics. The second volume challenges the credibility of various myths and unverified claims about Travancore's history. Instead, he offers new explanations and interpretations based on historical sources and evidence. Velu Pillai acknowledges the significance of the Parasurama tradition but emphasizes the need for historical analysis rather than relying solely on traditional accounts. He finds valuable materials within the legends that contribute to understanding the social and political history of Travancore and Kerala. Additionally, he provides a comprehensive account of the ancient, medieval, and modern political history.

In the third volume, he explores the economic history of the region, covering aspects such as economic conditions, land tenures, land taxes, forests, agriculture, irrigation, fisheries, means of communication, electric power, industries, trade and commerce, investment and credit, joint-stock companies, cooperative societies, education, and public health. The fourth volume delves into the general administration, including the land revenue department,



- ◆ *Economic history*
- ◆ *Various departments of the government respectively*

justice administration, power department, state force, jails, registration, public works department, water works and drainage department, marine department, medical department, local self-government, devaswom department, miscellaneous department, and more.

- ◆ *Provides valuable information*

Velu Pillai extensively examined the historical records utilized by T. Madhava Rao, P. Shangunny Menon, and Nagam Ayya in their works on the history of Travancore. He accessed the preserved records in *mathilakam* (local administrative offices), the palace, and the central vernacular records. These resources proved instrumental not only in revising the State Manual but also in providing long-term benefits to the state in various aspects. The Travancore State Manual continues to serve as a crucial source for studying the country's history. It remains a treasure trove of knowledge for the general readers and a valuable reference for researchers.

### C. Achyutha Menon

- ◆ *Cochin State Manual: The socio-economic and cultural life of Cochin*

C. Achyutha Menon, also known as C.P. Achyutha Menon, was a renowned figure in literary circles. He held various roles as an administrator, editor, historian, and one of the pioneering critics of Malayalam literature. In his notable work, the *Cochin State Manual*, he provides a comprehensive portrayal of the social, economic, political, and cultural aspects of the former state of Cochin. This manual was prepared following the model of the District Gazetteer of British India and consists of 537 pages, including an index, footnotes, and illustrations. Throughout his service to the Government of Cochin, he drew upon both archaeological and archival materials to compile this monumental work.

- ◆ *The Physical aspects of Cochin*

The book is divided into fifteen chapters, each covering various aspects of Kerala's history. In the first chapter, the author discusses the etymology, physical features, hills, river system, soils, climate, flora, fauna, and more. Subsequent chapters delve into topics such as the origin of Kerala, colonization, the subjugation of early settlers by immigrants or invaders and the early relations with the Perumals. The book also covers the early history of Cochin, the arrival of the Portuguese, conflicts with the Zamorin, Portuguese and Dutch dominance, Mysorean and British supremacy, administrative progress under figures like Sankaravarier, Diwan Venkata Rao, and T. Shankunni Menon. Additionally, it explores agriculture, irrigation, forest administration, occupations, trade, means of communication, public health,

education, land revenue, administration, religion, charitable institutions, administration of justice, and provides vivid descriptions of various places in Cochin.

- ◆ Lack of materials to reconstruct the ancient history of Cochin.

He states that the records preserved in the State Archives, ancient temples, and old aristocratic families do not pertain to any period before they were either destroyed over time or intentionally by people. Given these circumstances, he can only provide a brief summary of the significant events known or reasonably assumed to have occurred until the end of the fifteenth century. When discussing the ancient period, he heavily relies on traditional sources. As a result, he couldn't present an accurate portrayal of the early history of Cochin. Despite these limitations, his work serves as a valuable source of knowledge for those seeking information and makes a significant contribution to historical literature.

### 1.1.5 Histories of Kerala – From K.P. Padmanabha Menon to Recent Trends

The beginning of the 20th century saw the rise of a new middle class in Kerala that was educated in English. This middle class had a progressive perspective on social and political matters.

#### 1.1.5.1 K.P. Padmanabha Menon

- ◆ Modern historian of Kerala

K.P. Padmanabha Menon, the son of P. Shangunny Menon, is widely regarded as the first modern historian of Kerala. He served on the Travancore Marumakkathayam Committee while practicing law in Trivandrum. In 1908, the committee submitted its report. As a committee member, Padmanabha Menon extensively studied the unique matrilineal system in Kerala. He believed that the matrilineal system did not emerge in Kerala until the 14th century. He recommended fundamental reforms to transition the Kerala society into a patrilineal system. The *Marumakkathayam Report* remains a key document for studying this system.

Padmanabha Menon published his *Kochi Rajya Charithram* in two volumes in Malayalam in 1912 and 1914. The first volume consists of two parts. The first part focuses on the society of Cochin, while the second part explores the history of the Portuguese in Kerala, particularly in Cochin, and their activities. According to Menon, the Portuguese had three main objectives in Kerala: dominating sea trade, conquering



- ◆ *Kochi Rajya Charithram in two volumes*

territories, and spreading Christianity among the natives. The second volume is also divided into two parts. The first part discusses the dominance of the Dutch in Cochin, while the second part delves into the growth of British colonialism in Kerala.

Padmanabha Menon categorized the people of Kerala into two groups: the early settlers and the outsiders. He considered the *Cherumar*, *Pulayar*, and tribal people as the early settlers of Kerala, while the *Ezhavas*, *Nairs*, *Namboodiris*, Christians, Jews, and Muslims were outsiders who migrated and settled in Kerala. Although Menon relied on the traditional source *Keralolpathy* for recording ancient history, he expressed doubts about its reliability. He criticized the *Parasurama* legend and the conversion of *Cheraman Perumal* to Islam. Menon took a holistic approach to history and gave equal importance to social, religious, cultural, and political aspects.
- ◆ *Classified people of Kerala into two- early settlers and the outsiders*

Padmanabha Menon's *History of Kerala* was published in four volumes posthumously between 1924 and 1937. The book does not strictly follow a chronological order. Menon introduced a new scientific approach, similar to Logan, in writing the history of Kerala. After the publication of Menon's works, the study and writing of history in Kerala received a fresh boost. However, historians were hesitant to utilize the newly acquired primary sources and instead relied heavily on traditional sources for interpreting the ancient period.
- ◆ *Spirit of modern research*  
◆ *Social aspect of history*

**1.1.5.2 Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai**

The successful reconstruction of the early history of Kerala through the interpretation of inscriptions and other sources was accomplished by P.N. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai (referred to as Elamkulam). Elamkulam's main interest lay in linguistics. He extensively studied available inscriptions, utilizing Tamil Classical works to establish a scientific framework for understanding the ancient period of Kerala's history. Numerous articles on Kerala history written by Elamkulam were compiled into several Malayalam books, such as *Bhashyam Sahityavum*, *Kerala Charitrathile Irulatanja Etukal*, *Chila Kerala Charithra Prashnangal*, *Jenmi Sampradayam Keralathil*, *Chera Samrajyam Onpathum Pathum Noottandukalil*, among others. Some of these articles were also translated into English and published under the title *Studies in Kerala History*. Elamkulam's works continue to be regarded as pioneering contributions to the study of Kerala's early history.
- ◆ *Scientific interpretation of inscription*  
◆ *Scientific framework*

Elamkulam utilized the works of previous scholars and

- ◆ Concept of Hundred Years War
- ◆ Definite chronology

drew new conclusions based on their findings. He supported and complemented the evidence from inscriptions with references from Tamil literature. He emphasized the dominance of Brahmins in medieval Kerala society and the development of the Jenmi system. Elamkulam's writings elaborate on the social, political, economic, and cultural implications of the Jenmi system. He introduced the concept of the *Hundred Years War* between the Cheras and the Cholas. Despite its limitations, Elamkulam remains a pioneering figure in the field of Kerala history studies. The studies conducted by Elamkulam, the discovery of new source materials, social and cultural movements, ideological and methodological innovations, and the rise of radical political movements have generated renewed interest in the study of Kerala history among both local and foreign scholars in recent times.

### 1.1.5.3 Recent Trends

- ◆ Historical interpretation-Marxian theory

Due to national reconstruction and social reform movements in the provinces during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, new ideologies emerged. These ideologies fostered a philosophical awareness of a society free from exploitation and led to movements for social liberation. People began to realize the plight caused by the *Jati-Jenmi-Naduvazhi* system, or feudal system, and sought to change it. The peasant movements grew stronger, with a significant driving force behind these political movements being the interpretation of history based on Marx's theory. E.M.S Namboodiripad (hereafter referred to as EMS) and K. Damodaran were influential figures whose works emerged from this political climate.

- ◆ Agrarian problem

In 1945, E.M.S published *A Crore and a Quarter Malayalees*, a concise book that discussed the people divided into three administrative regions at the time: Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar. The book not only advocated for *Aikya Keralam* (United Kerala) but also aimed to portray the aspirations of Malayalees as they struggled against colonialism. EMS made an even more significant contribution by understanding the agrarian problem in Kerala. His dissenting statement on the Malabar Tenancy Reforms Committee Report (1939) demonstrated his intelligence and historical insight, making it a historic document. His research laid the groundwork for the transformation of Malabar's tenancy movement from one focused on superior tenants to a radical peasant movement led by agricultural laborers and inferior renters.



- ◆ Jathi-Jenmi-Naduvazhi system
- ◆ Marxist interpretation

In EMS's work *Keralam: Malayalikalude Mathrubhumi* published in 1948, he proposed a transition from primitive communism to what he called *Jathi-Janmi-Naduvazhi Medhavitvam* (feudal dominance). This referred to a social system where higher castes held dominance in social relations, janmis (landlords) in production relations, and naduvazhis (local chieftains) in administration, resulting in material and spiritual impoverishment of the majority. He later revised his historical analysis of Kerala's social evolution in *The National Question in Kerala* (1952), *Kerala: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (1967), and *Kerala Society and Politics: A Historical Survey* (1984), enriching the basic concept he proposed in 1948. The concept of *Jathi-Janmi-Naduvazhi Medhavitvam* characterized the complex pre-capitalist social structure of the region and had significant implications for the Left's agenda in the state. On the eve of independence, EMS was particularly concerned with the issue of nationality. K. Damodaran, an Indian Marxist theoretician and writer, analyzed Kerala's history through Marxist theory in his renowned work *Kerala Charithram*, which was published in 1966.

- ◆ Critique of Eurocentric belief

K.M. Panikkar's *A History of Kerala*, published in 1960, is another significant work on Kerala History. This notable book focuses on the colonial period of Kerala spanning from Vasco Da Gama's arrival in 1498 to the last years of colonial rule. Panikkar's historical inquiries were prompted by the misleading claims made by European powers. His historiography revolved around his disapproval of the capitalist development of Western European nations and their colonial exploitation in Asia. He strongly criticized the Eurocentric belief that attributed all valuable contributions to the Western world, viewing such claims as attempts to demoralize Asians. He believed it was crucial to raise awareness about the alarming rise of Western imperialism, leading him to write the history from 1498 to 1945. Some of his notable works include *Asia and Western Dominance*, *A Survey of Indian History*, and *India and the Indian Ocean*.

- ◆ Cohesive narrative
- ◆ Socio cultural history

A. Sreedhara Menon's *A Survey of Kerala History* incorporated Elamkulam's findings into a cohesive narrative, making it a useful introductory resource for laymen. M. G. S. Narayanan inherited Elamkulam's outstanding scholarship and significantly enhanced it through the discovery of new inscriptions, reinterpretation of old inscriptions, development of a more reliable chronology, more accurate identification of rulers, rectification of their sequence, and a new conceptualization and better characterization of various

aspects such as polity, society, economy, culture, religion, art, and architecture.

- ◆ Kerala as unified political entity

His work *Perumals of Kerala* (1972), which treats Kerala as a unified cultural entity, was the first successful endeavor to present the history of that era. M. G. S. Narayanan utilizes conceptual presuppositions about social systems in world history to structurally analyze Kerala society during the Perumal era. He approaches history from a broad perspective of socio-economic development and explores political institutions, migration patterns, land relations, culture, literature, religion, and other facets of Kerala's past.

- ◆ Follows the narrative style of M.G.S Narayanan
- ◆ T.H.P marginalised people

Kesavan Veluthat's *Settlements in Kerala* (1981) adopts a similar methodology and narrative style as M.G.S Narayanan. Veluthat updates traditional Brahmanism with new historical information. With the emergence of caste-based organizations and social reform movements, historical writings took on a new direction. It was within this context that works like Chetharassery's played a crucial role in empowering the oppressed class, fostering a sense of identity and caste-based self-respect. T.H.P. Chentharassery initiated his research on the history of the downtrodden in 1955. His first book, 'Ilavamkulavum Kerala Charitram,' shed light on the history of marginalized communities. He also authored biographies of figures such as Ambedkar, Poykayil Appachan, Pampadi John Joseph, and Swami Ananda Theerthan. His work 'Kerala Navodhana Nayakanmar' (2014) focused on the lives of social reformers who worked towards improving the conditions of Dalits, including Vellikkara Choti, Thycaud Ayyavu Swami, T. T Kesavan Sastri, K.V Patros, and others. His other notable works include 'Ayyankali - the first Dalit leader, History of the indigenous population in India, and Ambedkar and Indian history. Chentharassery's writings addressed the often-neglected aspects of history and shed light on the history of marginalized communities.

*Jativayavasthayum Kerala Charitram* by P.K. Balakrishnan (1992) aims to demonstrate that Kerala society remained static and primitive until the nineteenth century, presenting a negative view of the past as a whole. In this work, Balakrishnan challenges Elamkulam's biases and rejects his characterization of Kerala history as a product of imagination due to the lack of reliable source material. He dismisses temple inscriptions, which are a major group of primary sources, in the process. Balakrishnan's work is a



- ◆ *Rejecting characterization of Elamkulam*

biased critique resulting from methodological indifference and a lack of familiarity with the original material. However, the strong objections raised in the book did lead to a critical reevaluation of celebrated chapters in the early history of the state.

- ◆ *Human-nature interface- various relations of production*

K.N. Ganesh's work is known for its scientific approach to historical research, examining history within the framework of productive systems theory. His book, *Keralathinte Innalekal* ('The Yesterdays of Kerala'), provides a portrayal of the lives of people in Kerala from ancient times to the present, signaling a shift in Kerala historiography. Ganesh's focus lies on the interaction between humans and nature, as well as the various systems and production relations. His approach involves meticulous examination of original source material, the generation of new evidence, and conceptual interpretation. Rather than presenting a chronological history of the state, his objective is to shed light on specific aspects of social life from a contemporary historical perspective. He criticizes earlier works that glorify kings and empires while neglecting the realities of ordinary people's lives. Ganesh delves deep into discussions on the caste system, gender, agrarian system, trade, and social life. His works cover a wide range of topics, including the agrarian system, medieval trade, Kerala politics and society in the Middle Ages, temple culture, Malayalam literature, and medieval urban culture. Some of his other significant works include *Irapidiyanamarude Lokam* (1994), *Kunjan Nambiar: Vakkum Samoothavum, Pradesika Charitra Rachana Oru Kaipusthakam* (1997), *Kerala Samootha Padanangal* (2004), *Culture and Modernity in Kerala* (2004, edited work), *Kerala Samootham Innu Nale* (2008), *Locality and Culture in Kerala History: The Case of Tirurangadi* (2010), *Exercises on Modern Kerala History* (2013, edited work), *Prakrithiyum Manushyanum* (2014), and *Reflections on Pre-Modern Kerala* (2016).

- ◆ *Scientific analysis- utilisation of facts*

Due to social conditions and intellectual requirements, historical writings have undergone modifications and new methodologies have emerged. The discovery and publication of inscriptions and archaeological reports have brought forth new source materials for reconstructing early history. There has been a growing significance placed on scientific analysis and utilization of these sources. In the early decades of the twentieth century, a fresh social perspective emerged in Kerala's historiography. Furthermore, with the rise of the Indian national movement, there was a spreading political

awareness and sense of patriotism throughout the country. All of these factors necessitated changes in historical writings.

## Summarised Overview

The land of Kerala, a narrow coastal strip bounded by the Western Ghats on the east and the Arabian Sea on the west in the southern part of Indian Peninsula. Owing to this feature, Kerala's political and cultural isolation from the rest of the country. Based on the soil formation, the land of Kerala was divided into High land, Midland and Low land. The geography of Kerala considerably influenced the course of its history; insularity from the political convulsions that shook Northern India, the religion like Jainism, Buddhism and Brahmanism took a long time to penetrate into Kerala and so on. Therefore Kerala evolved its own way of life and social institutions which were not influenced by the outside world.

The history of Kerala had been drawn from the Tamil classics and archaeological evidence. The quasi historical works like *Keralolpathi* were used by some early historians to reconstruct the early history of Kerala. It's the *Brahmin* settler's concept of history of Kerala, which is a mixture of legend and history. It was rejected by the historians as a farrago of legendary nonsense. Atula's *Mushikavamsakavya*, a Sanskrit work which is a dynastic history, contains legendary material relating to the origin and early history of Mushika Kings of Kolathunadu. It furnishes reliable historical information. Shaikh Zainuddin's *Tuhfat-ul-Mujahiddin*, light on social customs of medieval Malabar. Apart from these the Parasurama legend, St. Thomas legend and Cheraman Perumal legend were used by the historians to reconstruct the history of ancient Kerala, even though it contains fables and exaggerations.

During 19th century Manuals, Gazetteers and Survey reports were prepared by the British authorities. They prepared it for the gathering of information about the land and the people, which helped them to establish their political power. These materials helped the historian to understand the socio-political, economic and cultural life of the period. The Tellicherry Consultations, The Report of the Joint Commissioners, the account of Francis Buchanan, William Logan Manual Manual gave detailed accounts of the land revenue settlements, transactions with East India Company, accounts of the events in Malabar in the initial years of British occupation etc.

The first native scholars who wrote about the early history of Kerala were Pachu Muthatu and P. Shangoonny Menon. They focused mainly on the political history of Travancore and overlooked the social and cultural aspects. Nagam Ayya, T.K. Velupillai, and C. Achyutha Menon also contributed to the study of the history of Travancore and Cochin. Another significant work was K.P. Padmanabhan's *Kochi*



*Rajya Charithram* and *Notes on the Letters of Visscher*, which was posthumously published as the *History of Kerala* in four volumes. These works emphasized the importance of the social aspects of Kerala's history for the first time.

K.M. Panikkar studied the history of the Portuguese and Dutch periods in his works. Later, Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai provided a new perspective to Kerala historiography. He reconstructed the history of Kerala through a systematic study of early inscriptions and Sangam literary works. He also provided a chronological framework for the political history of Kerala before the Portuguese period. Moreover, he explored sociological topics of interest such as *Marumakkathayam*, *Jenmi* system, and *Devadasi* system. He also traced the development of the Malayalam language and literature due to his interest in language.

M.G.S. Narayanan followed Elamkulam's approach by studying the early history of Kerala using inscriptions. He shed light on the social and cultural history of Kerala. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier analyzed the history of Kerala from an economic perspective. Writers like T.H.P. Chentharassery focused on the history of marginalized sections and their writings helped them gain a sense of identity and dignity. More works were written on social aspects, such as caste, like P.K. Balakrishnan's *Jativayavasthayum Kerala Charithravum*. K.N. Ganesh's areas of interest include studying the relationships between different production systems and the human-nature interface. Ganesh provided significant details about the caste system, gender, agrarian system, trade, and social life of the people.

*A Survey of Kerala History* by Sreedhara Menon is a useful introductory book for laymen. Later works provided more reliable historical information. Manuals, Gazetteers, and Reports furnished valuable insights into the economic, social, and cultural life of the people of Kerala. During the 20th century, more analytical and scientific history was produced. The history of neglected areas and marginalized communities received attention. These historical writings opened up new perspectives for the study of the life and history of the people of Kerala.

## Self Assessment

1. Which gap connected Kerala with Mysore?
2. Which gap in Western Ghat influenced the climate and highway of commerce in ancient Kerala?
3. Who referred to Parasurama Legend as "the most permanent and invariable factor of history"?
4. Which legend mentioned the origin and growth of Christianity in Kerala?
5. Name the legend related to the conversion of the last Chera ruler.



6. Who is the author of the book '*Mushika Vamsa Kavya*'?
7. What was the main purpose for preparing Manuals and Gazetteers?
8. In which year *Malabar District Gazetteer* was published?
9. Which was the first enquiry report of Malabar?
10. Who is the author of the work '*A Journey from Madras*'?
11. Name the author of Malabar Manual.
12. Which is the first book published in Kerala with the title 'History'?
13. Who is the author of '*Kochi Rajya Charithram*'?
14. One of the popular works of E.M.S. Namboodiripad which discusses the issue of nationality on the eve of independence?
15. Name the historian who was a strong critique of Eurocentric beliefs that demoralize Asians.
16. Who is the author of '*Perumals of Kerala*'?
17. Name the first book of T.H.P. Chentharassery.
18. Who is the author of the book '*Keralathinte Innalekal*'?
19. Who rejected the characterization of Kerala history by Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai through his book '*Jativayavasthayum Kerala Charithravum*'?
20. Who is the author of '*Asia and Western Dominance*'?

## Assignments

1. How is the history of Kerala determined by its ecology and geography?
2. Discuss the relevance of myths and legends in reconstructing the history of Kerala.
3. Illustrate the role of Manuals and Gazetteers in reconstructing the history of Kerala.
4. Critically analyse the efforts taken by Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai to reconstruct the history of Kerala.
5. T.H.P.Chentharassery's work helped marginalized people to acquire a sense of identity and self respect. Substantiate.



## Suggested Readings

1. Bikash Bhattacharya, *An Introduction to Historiography: World Perspective for Students and Scholars*, Dominant Publishers and Distributors Pvt. Ltd; New Delhi, 2011.
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6. Rajan Gurukkal and M.R. Raghava Varier (ed.), *Cultural History of Kerala*, Vol.I Department of Cultural Publications, Thiruvananthapuram.
7. S.K.Nayar, *Randu Keralolpathikal*, University of Madras.
8. S.M.H.Nainar, (trans.and ed.), *Tuhfat al Mujahideen*, Madras, 1942.
9. T.K.Gangadharan, *History of Kerala*, Calicut University.

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1. A.Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2007.
2. K.K. Kusuman (ed.), *Issues in Kerala Historiography*, ICKS, Thiruvananthapuram, 2003.
3. Rajan Gurukkal and M.R. Raghava Varier (ed.), *Cultural History of Kerala*, Vol.I, Department of Cultural Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999.
4. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier, *History of Kerala: Prehistoric to the Present*, The Orient Blackswan, 2018.
5. Rajendran.P, *The Pre-historic Cultures and Environment*, Classical Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1990.
6. Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India, From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*, Pearson Education India, 2009.



## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.





# Early Settlements

## Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ♦ create an idea about the Prehistoric culture in Kerala
- ♦ analyse various stages of prehistoric cultures existed in Kerala
- ♦ analyse the evolution of human settlements in Kerala
- ♦ outline the transition towards a settled society

## Background

In the previous unit, we discussed the geographical settings of Kerala and the early historical writings that helped us understand its early history. In this unit, we will examine the pre-history of Kerala. Ancient cultures before the use of language and writing are referred to as prehistoric.

Geographically protected and culturally unified by the presence of the Arabian Sea in the West and Western Ghats in the east, the land of Kerala extends about 560 km from North to South with an equally long coastline, enabling the preservation of a predominantly homogeneous culture with roots dating back to prehistoric times. Ancient cultures before the use of language and writing are generally referred to as prehistoric.

## Keywords

Prehistoric cultures, Megalithic Culture , Iron Age Culture, Rock engravings, artefacts, Archaeological remains

## Discussion

In Kerala, the prehistoric cultures primarily include the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic periods, representing the transition from primitive lifestyles to agriculture, animal husbandry, ceramic technology, and settled habits.



### 1.2.1 Prehistoric Life

- ◆ *No serious excavations till 1974*

Prehistoric studies in India began as early as 1863 with the discovery of the first collection of Paleolithic tools in Pallavaram, Madras, by Robert Bruce Foote. Since then, numerous prehistoric sites have been explored and excavated throughout India. Kerala was initially considered a region outside the scope of Paleolithic habitation until 1974, being inadvertently neglected. Foote believed that the dense forests in Kerala would have made Paleolithic exploration unlikely.

- ◆ *Late stonage cult-Chevayur -Marayur*

In the mid-19th century, archaeologist Killingworth Richard Utten Todd made a significant discovery of a collection of Microliths in Chevayur, Kozhikode District. From then on, Kerala became known for its Late Stone Age artifacts, which placed the region on the world prehistory map. In 1973, archaeological explorations conducted by Padmanabhan Thampi revealed a valuable collection of Mesolithic cave art and Microliths in Marayur, confirming the existence of Late Stone Age culture in Kerala. However, Kerala had limited archaeological data, which led archaeologists to rely on comparative evidence from similar sites.

### Paleolithic Culture

- ◆ *Tools made of quartzite is absent in Kerala*

Studies have revealed several archaeological pieces of evidence from both the Pleistocene and Holocene periods, including stone age sites of the Paleolithic and Mesolithic eras, across of Kerala such as Kannur, Wayanad, Kozhikkodu, Malappuram, Palakkad, Kottayam, Kollam, and Thiruvananthapuram. The Paleolithic tools found in Kerala are primarily made from locally available river-worn quartz pebbles, with occasional use of gneiss pebbles and flakes. These Paleolithic tools belong to the chopper-scraper-flake tradition. Sites like Valluvassery, Karimpulakkal, and Kunnahubalu near Nilambur in the Beypore river basin, Tenkara and Kanjirapuzha near Palakkad in the Bharathapuzha basin, Mukkali in the Bhavani basin of Palakkad District, Kunnonni in South Poonjar in the Meenachil basin of Kottayam District, and Abhayagiri in the Kollam District, mainly feature Chopper-Scraper-Flake assemblages made of quartz. Tools made from quartzite are not found in Kerala.

There were two main Paleolithic traditions in India, namely Chopper and Bifacial. However, determining the precise dating of the Paleolithic culture in Kerala is



- ◆ *Artefacts-pre mesolithic period*

challenging due to the limited relics available for scientific dating. During this period, the people relied entirely on the environment and adapted their subsistence strategies accordingly. The population would have been very small, although their distribution appears to be relatively widespread. The Paleolithic industries in North Kerala represent a rudimentary form of artifacts that differ from the Mesolithic industries in the region.

### Mesolithic Culture

- ◆ *24 Mesolithic sites including rock shelters have been discovered*

A total of twenty-four Mesolithic sites, including rock-shelters, have been discovered in various geographical zones. The prominent sites identified so far include Nirmalagiri in the Kannur District, Walayar, Malampuzha, Podippara, Mankara, Kulappalli, Cherakkaippadi, Ayannur, Agali, Narasimokkai, and Chirakkadavu in the Palakkad District; Chellur and Pandikkad in the Malappuram District, Tenmala and Odanavattom in the Kollam District, and Ankode and Neyyar in the Thiruvananthapuram District. The Mesolithic tools found in Kerala are primarily made of flakes, and the types of tools include bifacial points, blades, lunates, borers, burins, baked knives, scrapers, discoids, and small choppers made from medium-sized pebbles.

- ◆ *Mesolithic industries have similarities with those of other south Indian states*

The Mesolithic culture in Kerala reached its peak in the early Holocene and lasted until 3000 BCE. Stone tools were the main evidence of their technological expertise. Around sixty to seventy percent of the tools were made from flakes. The Mesolithic industries in Kerala share similarities with those found in various parts of South India, particularly in the Konkan, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and even Sri Lanka. During this period, there was a significant increase in the number of sites, which might suggest a rise in the population. These people occupied more shelters and caves, possibly due to the formation of smaller tribes and clans through the splitting of larger bands.

### Neolithic Culture

- ◆ *No reliable dating*
- ◆ *Hand axe-pecularity*

With the retreat of the great glaciers and the subsequent increase in temperature, early humans emerged from the caves. The significant environmental changes, along with various other factors, led to the transformation of the long-lasting early Stone Age. The polished celt or hand axe is a typical tool found in Neolithic sites worldwide, although the raw materials used varied from place to place. The Neolithic period, which marked the shift from food gathering to

food production and brought about the first major social transformation, is often considered a revolution. However, there is no reliable dating for the Neolithic culture in Kerala.

- ◆ *Philip Lake first discovered Neolithic axes*

Philip Lake was the first to discover Neolithic axes at the foot of the Kannyakad hills in Kerala. Later, Logan and Fawcett collected a few quartz flakes, a fragment of a Neolithic Celt, and a couple of beads from the Wayanad area. Polished stone axes and beads that are characteristic of the Wayanad District and the riverbeds of the Periyar in Aluva have been found. Neolithic axes were made from locally available gneiss or granite rocks.

- ◆ *Neolithic to Chalcolithic*

The Neolithic artifacts discovered in Kerala indicate that the culture, diffused from neighboring states, evolved here parallel to developments in other regions of South India. Due to the lack of habitation sites and excavated materials, our knowledge about the ethnic, organisational, customary, and ritual aspects of the Neolithic material culture remains limited. Following the Neolithic Age, the Chalcolithic period emerged in other parts of India, characterized by the use of copper alongside polished stone tools. Human bone remains found in some urn burials possibly indicate the Chalcolithic phase. It's worth noting that bronze or copper products were prevalent in pre-Iron Age sites elsewhere in the country.

#### **1.2.1.1 Rock Shelters and Prehistoric Rock Arts**

- ◆ *Rock art study -19th century*

The importance of ancient rock art as a significant source of prehistoric culture in a region cannot be overstated. The study of rock art began in the latter half of the 19th century as part of the expanding intellectual exploration into various aspects of human society and specific cultures. In 1883, India made its mark on the world map of rock art with the discoveries of rock art sites in Central and Northern India by John Archibald Carlyle and Cockburn.

Across the globe, the Mesolithic Age, which served as an evolutionary intermediate stage between the Old Stone Age and the New Stone Age, is known for its abundance of pictographs and petroglyphs. Although the earliest works of art are generally credited to Homo sapiens, this holds true for the Indian subcontinent, including Kerala. Cave art can be categorized into three phases: the primeval phase featuring black outline drawings of animals with thin monochrome fillings, the second phase with outlines filled in using two-color modeling, and the third phase consisting of polychrome

- ◆ *Cave art can be categorised into three phases*

paintings. In the first two phases, the pictures were depicted on projections, making use of natural light and shading. The third phase, which includes world-famous prehistoric paintings, is particularly impressive. Dating prehistoric rock art is a challenging task as it may encompass representations from various periods ranging from prehistoric to historic times. Padmanabhan Thampi was the first to draw the attention of archaeologists and historians to the various rock art sites in Kerala. He studied the rock-cut paintings on the Marayur hills.

### **Painted Rock Shelters of Marayur**

- ◆ *Mesolithic sites rich in Petrographs and Petroglyphs*

There are three rock shelters located in different sites of Anjanad: Koodakkad, Pallanad, and Champakkad. These shelters are also known as Ezhuthala, which means the 'cave of pictures', Attala, and Puratchi Ala. All of them fall under the jurisdiction of the Marayur Panchayat. At the Kodakkad site, the petroglyphs are found on a single granite boulder with a wide concavity. The entire surface is adorned with paintings and engravings depicting horses, bulls, elephants with and without mahouts, seated figures resembling human beings with raised arms, palm impressions, auspicious symbols, ritual dancers, and ceremonial scenes. The colors used include red-ochre, grey, pinkish buff, saffron, and brownish yellow, similar to rock paintings found elsewhere. The petroglyphs in the second shelter, Pallanadu, consist solely of white paintings on the ceiling, resembling the open mouth of a creeping lizard. The third shelter, Champakkad, is a large hall with ample space to accommodate at least 10 families. In terms of area, this rock shelter is the largest.

### **The Edakkal Rock Engravings**

The Edakkal Rock is located on Ambukuthi mala, a hill in the Western Ghats. It stands at an elevation of approximately 4600 feet MSI and is situated about 10 kilometers southwest of Sultan Bathery in the Wayanad District of Kerala, India. This prehistoric rock shelter is formed naturally by three large boulders, with one resting on top of the other two, creating a roof-like structure with its bottom jutting out in between. The name "Edakkal" literally means "a stone in between." In 1894, the site was identified as a Neolithic habitat based on the engravings on the cave walls, which resembled those made with Neolithic Celts. Fred Fawcett discovered the rock engravings in the cave in 1901. The Edakkal cave lies along an ancient route that connected the high ranges of Mysore to the

- ◆ *Edakkal Cave identified as Neolithic habitational site in 1894*

ports of Malabar. The cave walls feature representations of six basic elements: canoes, crosses, triangles, squares, circles, and volutes. The art style found in Edakkal is characterised by straight-line geometric patterns that require patience rather than specific skills. The cave art includes human figures in ritual dance postures, animals such as elephants, wild dogs, and deer in a forest environment, as well as wheeled carts with drivers. The Edakkal Rock Art gallery exhibits two distinct styles of representation: one that focuses solely on primary signs and another that incorporates both primary, secondary, and mediating signs to create figures.

### Engravings at Tovari

- ◆ *Engravings smaller and thinner incisions*

The site commonly known as Ezhuthupura, located on the slope of Thovarimala, is not far from the famous rock art site of Edakkal in the same Ambalavayal Taluk panchayat. The engraved rock is a short distance below the hill's summit. The site consists of three or four large boulders with a massive rock slanting on them, creating a sloped surface. The engravings are found on the left surface of the supporting rock and on the ceiling. The Tovari drawings primarily feature geometrical figures such as triangles, squares, and circles. One of the drawings is a square divided into eight sections, possibly representing terraced farming fields. There are also repeated triangles. Most of the figures are drawn with shallow and narrow lines, indicating they were created by rubbing stone blades of various sizes on the rock surface.

### Engravings at Ankode

- ◆ *Mesolithic tools*

Ankode, also known locally as 'pandavampara', is situated in the village of Perumkadavila in Neyyattinkara Taluk, Thiruvananthapuram District. Mesolithic tools were found at this site in a stratified context. The engravings consist of decorative floral designs on the entrance wall, a few human figures, geometric patterns, and sun symbols inside. The human figures are depicted in a hunting pose with bows and arrows. The engravings at Ankode are smaller in size and different from those found elsewhere.

### Carvings of Thenmala Shelter

Thenmala, located in the Kollam District, is another prehistoric rock shelter with carvings. It displays geometrical patterns such as triangles, circles, squares, and a flower motif. The circle has marks resembling spokes, giving it

◆ *Geometrical patterns*

the appearance of a wheel. The entire surface of the rock is covered with parallel lines, similar to those at Edakkal. Mesolithic tools have been found in stratified layers within this rock shelter. Considering the presence of Mesolithic artifacts both on the surface and below the surface, it is evident that the carvings on the exterior of the rock shelter were made by the Mesolithic people.

◆ *Technological innovations and development*

These are some notable characteristics of Kerala's prehistoric cultural heritage, which are clearly visible in the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic periods. They demonstrate a continuous prehistoric cultural development in Kerala, with distinct technological advancements and a separate identity. The archaeological findings from various prehistoric cultures in Kerala indicate that the region experienced several technological innovations and developments to adapt to the local environment.

◆ *Commemorative monuments erected in honour of dead*

The Megaliths, which are monuments and burial sites, are the most prominent archaeological remnants of the Iron Age in Kerala and peninsular India as a whole. The Iron Age is commonly known as the Megalithic Age due to its characteristic of erecting large stone monuments for the deceased. This megalithic tradition likely reached Kerala around the middle of the first millennium BCE and remained prevalent for approximately ten centuries until the middle of the first millennium CE. These monuments are widely distributed throughout Kerala. The archaeological evidence from this period includes the Megaliths themselves, as well as Roman and punch-marked coins, and Brahmi inscriptions. Literary evidence comes from accounts by Graeco-Roman writers and ancient Tamil texts. However, compared to Tamil Nadu or Karnataka, the archaeological remains other than grave goods are scarce for Early Historic Kerala. Tamil Nadu has identified and excavated several Early Historic sites such as Tirukkampuliyur, Arikamedu, Puvuvampatti, and Kotumanal.

## 1.2.2 Megalithic Relics

### 1.2.2.1 Typology and Distribution

Various types of burials, including urns, pits, cists, and dolmens, characterized by stone or cairn circles, menhirs, alignments, and rock-cut tombs, are found in the region. In Kerala, common megalithic burials or monuments consist of an urn or a pit, along with a single-chambered dolmen or cist. Local names such as *Kottakkal*, *toppikal*, *murajapa*, *munimata*,

- ◆ Dolmens, Port-hole Cists, Menhirs, Umbrella Stones and Capstones

and *guha* are used to refer to these types, but their English equivalents can be confusing as they may approximate terms used in English. The urn burial is referred to by various names, such as *mancara*, *mutumakkattazi*, *nannannati*, and *annanazhikkutan*. However, based on notable characteristics, the following can be identified as the major types of megaliths in Kerala.

### Urns, Sarcophagi and Pits

- ◆ Bovine shaped Sarcophagi
- ◆ Black and Red ware

Among the burial types in Kerala, urn burial is the most common. The urns are poorly baked black-and-red ware of various sizes, ranging from 2.1 to 4.2 feet. These urns are found throughout the regions with red soil and represent the most widely spread burial type. Typically, the urns and pits are sealed with stone slabs, although sometimes they are also sealed with ceramic vessels. A sarcophagus is a terracotta coffin with legs. Sarcophagi shaped like bovines have been reported in Perunkulam and Kattakampal in the Thrissur District.

### Dolmens and Cists

- ◆ Dolmens and Cists are one or more chamber graves

The dolmens and cists consist of one or more chambers created using granite slabs. There are more dolmenoid cists with an eastern porthole compared to the dolmens that are built above the ground. These structures can be found in various locations, including the rocky midlands and the high ranges. Elenthikara and Angamally in the Ernakulam District are known for several large dolmenoid cists, while Kuppakkolli in the Wayanad District showcases this type of structure in the plains and high ranges respectively.

### Umbrella Stones and Cap-Stones

- ◆ Laterite areas
- ◆ Not associated with iron weapon

The umbrella stones, known as *kutakkal*, represent a unique and the most beautiful type among the megaliths of Kerala. They are found mostly in the laterite areas in the Districts of Kozhikode, Malappuram and Thrissur. Numerous *kutakkal* are found at Vellarakkal in the Talappilly Taluk. However, unlike the case of dolmens, umbrella stones have not been found associated with Iron weapons or charred bones anywhere. The Cap Stones, known as the *toppikkal* are hemispherical stones used as the lids put on burial urns. The *toppikkal* do not have wide distribution and they are found mainly in the Thrissur District. Cheramangad and Eyyal in the Thrissur District are the most well known sites of the *toppikkal*.



## Rock-Cut Chambers

- ◆ *Classification of rock-cut chambers*

These Rock-Cut Chambers are found all over the laterite beds mostly within and north of the Thrissur District. They are called rock-cut caves, shaft graves and rock-cut tombs. They are found in many varieties, but largely classified into two types viz., the single-chambered and the multi-chambered. The grave goods of the rock-cut chamber tombs included iron implements and pottery of different kinds. Those at Eyyal, Porkalam, Kattakampal and Sukapuram in the Thrissur District rank foremost among the known laterite chamber tombs of Kerala in terms of size and interior details.

## Menhirs and Alignments

- ◆ *Erected over the urn burials*

Menhirs are large standing stones typically erected above urn burials, although in some excavation cases, menhirs have been found without any relics. Ramavarmapuram, Anappara, Kuttur, Churakkattukara, and Muttam are well-known sites of menhirs located in parts of the Thrissur District. In Ramavarmapuram, the menhir is locally referred to as *Pulacchikkal*.

- ◆ *Kutakkal- didn't have any resemblance with other regions*

The urns found in Kerala can be seen as a continuation of the Neolithic-Chalcolithic settlements in the Karnataka-Tamil Nadu regions. Some urns, like the *kutakkal*, do not have similar types elsewhere in the subcontinent, but there are comparisons to be made with similar examples in Western and Southeast Asian regions.

## 1.2.3 Permanent Settlements in Iron Age

- ◆ *Iron tools in megalithic burials*

The Iron Age marked an early historic social development in South India. The origins of iron in South India and Kerala are still debated. Some scholars suggest that iron technology, which initially reached northern India through the Gangetic plains from Asia Minor, made its way to the south through central and western India. They note that the iron smelting methods in South India differed from those in North India. In Kerala, iron tools have been discovered as part of grave goods in Megalithic sites and within burial urns. The introduction of iron allowed ancient communities to clear forests, cultivate new lands, and protect themselves and their crops. Iron also led to the production of more advanced weapons. Those with knowledge of ironworking held power over others and gained control over reclaimed lands, iron weapons, and a share of others' production. They established dominance over societies with less advanced economies and technologies.

### 1.2.3.1 Economic Life

- ◆ *Reference of cultivation of various crops*

The economic life of people forms the foundation of their culture, as culture primarily encompasses material aspects. Culture arises from the material processes of human existence in nature. During the Early Iron Age, people adopted various means of subsistence, including hunting and gathering, animal husbandry, agriculture, and crafts production, as evidenced by burial goods. There is no significant archaeological evidence of animal domestication at any of the Iron Age sites in Kerala. However, literary references indicate that buffaloes, cattle, goats, and even elephants were raised during the Early Historic period. There are ample mentions of the cultivation of various crops such as rice, millets, sugarcane, pepper, and horticultural plants like plantains and jackfruit. The economy of the Early Iron Age relied on kinship-based production, redistributive consumption, and reciprocal exchange, where goods were exchanged for other goods.

### 1.2.3.2 Knowledge and Technology

- ◆ *Interact with nature for their subsistence*

The extensive knowledge accumulated by the people of the Iron Age through their interactions with nature for sustenance and survival cannot be fully recovered through archaeology. Metal artifacts are the primary archaeological remnants that can be examined in this regard.

### Metal Technology

- ◆ *Iron smelting specialized craft practiced by specific tribes or clans*

Ironworking played a central role in the technology of the time. The presence of high-quality and diverse iron artifacts in the burials suggests that iron smelting was a specialized craft. The origin of copper in Kerala is still unknown. This raises the possibility that either the copper or bronze artifacts or their raw materials were imported from elsewhere, most likely from West Asia. The gold ornaments from Puliur showcase exceptional craftsmanship. It is believed that there were a few sources of gold, as evidenced by the sites in the Nilgiri ranges. Burial relics include various iron weapons like swords, tang daggers, and wedge-shaped blades. However, the number of bronze and copper objects found in the Megaliths of Kerala is limited, similar to other regions in peninsular India.

### Crafts

The artifacts found in the graves indicate the presence of various crafts beyond metalworking. It is likely that there



- ◆ *Various craft were found-burial graves*

were several craft items made from perishable materials such as wood. Copper, silver, and gold bangles, ear ornaments, and rings were discovered. Additionally, beads made of glass, wax, bones, carnelian, feldspar, quartz, crystal, and jasper have been unearthed from dolmenoid cists, urns, and rock-cut chamber tombs at multiple locations in Kerala.

### Ceramics

- ◆ *Black and Red Ware and Red Slip Ware are predominant*

The pottery found in the Megalithic sites includes different types of wares, such as black-and-red ware, russet-coated ware, and painted ware, which are discovered in the burial sites. The main ceramic objects unearthed from the Megalithic sites in Kerala consist of urns, bowls, dishes, vases, jars, ring stands, and globular pots. The smaller vessels have shiny, smooth surfaces, while the larger ones are roughly finished and made by hand. In some cases, a white coating is applied over the pattern using a red wash or slip.

### Architectural Knowledge

- ◆ *Skill in designing and executing structures*

The megalithic monuments reveal the architectural expertise of the Iron Age people. Various types of monuments, such as rock-cut chamber tombs, transept passage chambers, dolmenoid cists, and multiple hood-stones, demonstrate the remarkable skill involved in designing and constructing these structures. The construction of these large burial monuments indicates the builders' knowledge and technology in identifying, cutting, shaping, and transporting the raw materials required for construction.

### Social Organisation

- ◆ *Stratification of society based on burials - negated by the historians*

The discovery of a few ploughshares in some dolmens in the Western Ghats suggests the practice of rice cultivation during the Iron Age. The Iron Age people primarily consisted of tribal descent groups, either sedentary or nomadic, regardless of their means of subsistence. While some burials were more elaborate and yielded rare bronze or gold artifacts, many were simple urn burials with very few artifacts. The wide variety, high quality, and fine craftsmanship of ceramic goods also hint at differences in social status, similar to the case of large burials. William Logan previously suggested that large burial monuments belonged to the upper class, while simple monuments were for ordinary people. However, historians now believe that this does not necessarily indicate social stratification, but rather a ranked society with chieftains of different ranks. This prompts us to explore the nature of contemporary political power.

## Political Power

- ◆ *Nature of political system unclear*

Differences in the size of monuments and the nature of mortuary practices, which indicate variations in status and ranking, provide insights into the nature of political power during that time. However, the exact nature of the political system remains unclear even today. Recent studies challenge the assumption of a stratified society. It doesn't make sense to consider people belonging to tribal descent groups as part of a stratified society with aristocrats, as it is anachronistic. Grand burials such as dolmenoid cists, transepted passage chambers, and rock-cut chamber tombs would have been constructed much later to bury aristocrats. It seems that there were numerous small chiefdoms spread throughout the region. It's important to note that ancient clans cannot be compared to present-day clans living in forest ecosystems. Drawing conclusions about the nature of power and material status enjoyed by ancient clans using the ethnography of marginal communities today is difficult.

- ◆ *Sangam poems portrays the living conditions of the Age*

During the Iron Age and the megalithic tradition, people relied on various means of subsistence determined by the local ecological conditions. They engaged in interactions and exchanged material and cultural goods with one another. It was a period marked by predatory actions carried out by chieftains, both big and small, individually or in collaboration. The Tamil heroic texts reflect the existence of larger chiefdoms during this phase, expanding the social context, power relations, institutional structures, and cultural milieu.

## Summarised Overview

Prehistory refers to the account of humankind's progress in the long ages before the emergence of written history. A significant number of recent archaeological discoveries have enhanced our understanding of cultural development. However, prehistory in Kerala remains largely unknown. Scholars have different opinions regarding the existence of prehistoric ages in Kerala. Historians reconstruct the life of prehistoric people through various artifacts and relics. Paleolithic and Neolithic stone tools, as well as rock paintings, have been found in different parts of Kerala.

Several Paleolithic and Mesolithic sites have been identified in various districts of Kerala. Paleolithic sites in Kerala are characterized by quartz chopper-scaper-flake assemblages, while tools made of quartzite are absent. Around twenty-four Mesolithic sites have been discovered in Kerala. These sites yielded Mesolithic



tools made of flakes. The Mesolithic industries in Kerala show similarities to those found in other South Indian states and lasted until around 3000 BCE. The precise dating of Neolithic culture in Kerala remains uncertain. Neolithic artifacts, including an axe, were discovered by Philip Lake from the foot of Kannyakad hills in Kerala. Logan and Fawcett also collected Neolithic artifacts from Wayanad. Evidence suggests that Kerala's Neolithic culture had interactions and influences from neighboring states.

The Iron Age marked the early historic social formation in South India. Chronology related to the Iron Age is subject to differing opinions. Megalithic monuments, erected in honor of the deceased using large stone blocks, are found throughout the state. Dolmens, porthole cists, menhirs, umbrella stones, and capstones are common types of megalithic structures in Kerala. While there are variations in form, some cultural artifacts exhibit a degree of homogeneity. Understanding the socio-economic aspects and settlement patterns of megalithic culture in Kerala is challenging due to the absence of habitation sites and the focus on burial sites. The distribution of specific types of burials depended on the region's physiography and the availability of raw materials.

Engravings and rock paintings are found in caves such as Edakkal, Thovarimala, Ankode, and Thenmala. These engravings and paintings feature geometric designs, decorative floral motifs, human figures, geometric patterns, sun symbols, and wheeled carts. The megalithic people were the first to utilize laterite soil in construction and demonstrate carpentry skills through iron chisels, nails, and axes. Iron implements and pottery provide insights into the subsistence patterns of the megalithic people.

Debates surrounding the nature of society and politics during the Iron Age are ongoing. Some scholars argue that variations in material goods and the size of burial monuments indicate social status differentiation, but historians have rejected the notion of stratification based solely on burials. Instead, they suggest that megalithic practices in Kerala likely continued until the turn of the Common Era, with urn burials possibly lasting until the second century CE.

## Self Assessment

1. Who discovered the first hoard of Palaeolithic implements from Pallavaram?
2. Mention the characteristics of Palaeolithic implements discovered from Kerala.
3. Name the important Mesolithic sites in Kerala.
4. Who discovered Neolithic axes from the foot of Kannyakad hills?

5. Name the archaeologist who studied the Rock art for the first time in Kerala.
6. Write a short answer on engravings of Tovarimala.
7. What are Megaliths?
8. What do you know about umbrellas or 'kudakkallu'?
9. Mention the major Megalithic sites in Kerala.
10. What do you know about Dolmens.

## Assignments

1. Explain the extent of pre-historic cultures in Kerala.
2. Illustrate the nature of Megalithic culture in Kerala.
3. Discuss the permanent settlements in the Iron Age.
4. Examine the characteristics of Palaeolithic culture in Kerala.
5. Elaborate on the burial practices in the Megalithic period.

## Suggested Readings

1. A. Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2007.
2. Rajan Gurukkal And Rahava Varier (ed.), *Cultural History of Kerala*, vol.I, Department of Cultural Publications, Kerala, 1999.
3. T.Satyamurthy, *Iron Age in Kerala*, State Archaeology Department, Thiruvananthapuram.

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1. A. Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2007.
2. K.K.Kusuman (ed.), *Issues in Kerala Historiography*, ICKS, Thiruvananthapuram, 2003.



3. N.R.Banerji, *Iron Age In India*, New Delhi,1965.
4. Rajan Gurukkal And Rahava Varier (ed.), *Cultural History of Kerala*, vol.I, Department of Cultural Publications, Kerala, 1999.
5. Sivasankaran Nair, *Early History of Kerala upto A.D. 1500*, International Centre for Kerala Studies, University of Kerala, Kariavattom, 2010.
6. T.K.Gangadharan, *History of Kerala*, Calicut University, Central Co-operative Stores Ltd, Calicut University.

### Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.





# Multiple Economies in the Early Centuries

## Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ analyse the life, culture and society of the Sangam Age
- ◆ analyse the concept of *aintinai*
- ◆ examine the folk songs and oral traditions of ancient *Tamizhakam*
- ◆ analyse the transition towards sanskritisation and socio-economic stratification

## Background

The previous unit provides a detailed overview of prehistoric Kerala and its significance in shaping the historical age. The Sangam age, which spanned the first five centuries of the Christian Era, played a pivotal role in the history of Kerala. During this period, Kerala was part of a larger region known as *Tamizhakam*. The land was divided into five distinct regions based on topography: Venad, Kuttanad, Kудanad, Puzhinada, and Karkanad. In terms of governance, the early Sangam age witnessed the rule of three main powers in Kerala: the Ays in the south, the rulers of *Ezhimala* (Mount Eli) in the north, and the Cheras in the region between them.

## Keywords

*Sangam, Tinai, Sanskritisation, Stratification, Kuti, Clan*

## Discussion

### 1.3.1 Sangam Period

The geographical heartland of Dravidian culture in the Indian peninsula stretches from the hills in the north to the cape of Kanyakumari in the south, with long coastlines on the east and west. *Tamizhakam*, existing for over a millennium between 500 BCE and 500 CE, represents a distinctive



- ◆ Economic, social, political and cultural life

socio-economic entity. This region encompassed diverse ecosystems including coasts, river basins, forested hills, grassy highlands, and arid zones. The geographical reality finds expression in Dravidian poetry through the concept of the five terrains known as *Aintinais*. The Tamil heroic poems provide insights into the socio-cultural practices of the ancient peoples who were closely connected to nature.

### 1.3.1.1 Literature

- ◆ Folk songs-oral traditions

The folk songs and oral traditions of ancient *Tamizhakam* were passed down from one generation to another, and during this transmission, several additions were made to them. These Tamil songs were eventually compiled and consolidated at a later stage. They provide insights into the society of ancient *Tamizhakam*, roughly from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE to the 4th century CE. Until recently, the ancient history of South India relied heavily on these Tamil songs, and the reconstructed period was referred to as the Sangam Age. These classical Tamil songs are the earliest written works available in South India.

- ◆ Sangam - literary academy

It is believed that the Sangam was an assembly of scholars or a “literary academy” of Tamil poets, possibly supported by the ruling class. The center of the Sangam was Madurai. The Tamil commentary called *Irainar Akaporul*, from the middle of the 8th century CE, mentions the existence of three separate literary academies in the capital of the Pandyas. According to the commentary, the three Sangams lasted for 9,900 years, involved 8,598 poets, and were patronized by 197 Pandyan kings. The classical Tamil works are divided into three sections known as *Ettutokai*, *Pathupattu*, and *Patinenkizhkanakku*, as stated in the commentary *Irainar Akaporul*. The style and historical references in the poems suggest that they were composed between the 3rd century BCE and the 3rd century CE. They were later compiled into anthologies in the mid-8th century.

*Ettutokai* refers to the eight literary works known as *Nattinai*, *Kurumthokai*, *Ainkurunuru*, *Patittupattu*, *Paripatal*, *Kalithokai*, *Akananuru*, and *Purananuru*. The works of *Ettutokai* are divided into *Akam* and *Puram* songs. The *akam* poetry explores sentiments and emotions related to sensuality, passionate love, and sexual union. The *puram* poetry discusses achievements and heroic actions in the context of conflict and public life. These poems were composed based on earlier bardic songs that were passed down orally.



◆ *Sangam literary works*

before being written. The earliest among these works is a grammar text called *Tolkappiyam*, which covers phonology, semantics, syntax, and literary conventions. The Tamil epics *Manimekhalai* and *Silappatikaram*, written in the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century, are valuable sources for understanding South India. Several didactic works in Tamil were written during the post-5<sup>th</sup> century period, with the most famous being Tiruvalluvar's *Tirukkural*, a work on ethics, governance, and love.

### 1.3.1.2 Archaeological Remains, Epigraphs and Coins

◆ *Important Archaeological sources*

The early history of South India was reconstructed based on archaeological, epigraphical, and numismatic sources, as well as Sangam literature. Archaeological sources include various types of burials, funerary deposits, Tamil Brahmi cave inscriptions, and Graeco-Roman coins.

◆ *Comprised of burials*  
◆ *Hunting tools dominate*

The Tamil region's early history is characterized by the presence of diverse "Black and Redware" (BRW) strands. Archaeological evidence mainly consists of burials, with few habitational sites. Various pottery types, beads, bangles, iron artifacts, copper and bronze objects have been discovered at different sites. Agricultural implements such as ploughshares, hoes, shovels, sickles, and spades, except for ploughshares, are primitive. Hunting tools dominate, while agricultural tools are less prominent, representing the culture of sedentary agriculture, pastoralists, and subsistence farmers.

◆ *Craft production*

The evidence of craft production, brick-making, and barter at certain sites is associated with the initial phase of urban development in the south. Iron artifacts, pottery, gold and silver beads, copper, hornblends, bone, glass, terracotta, semi-precious stones, and shell bangles demonstrate specialization in crafts. Brick constructions have been found through excavations in Kanchipuram, Kunnathur, Kaveripattinam, Uraiyur, and Thrikkampuliyur. Terracotta spindle whorls and dye-vats discovered at specific sites indicate textile manufacturing, while excavations at Nattamedu uncovered the glass industry.

◆ *Epigraphical evidence-heterodox religious sects*

Valuable evidence of India's maritime trade was found at Arikamedu. A brick structure in the northern settlement of Arikamedu was identified as a warehouse, and two walled courtyards associated with tanks and drains were tentatively identified as dyeing vats where muslin cloth was dyed and prepared for export. Amphorae and arretine ware pottery demonstrate foreign influences. The earliest post-Mauryan

epigraphical material, specifically the Tamil Brahmi cave inscriptions, signify the presence of Jain and Buddhist people. The Tamil Brahmi inscription at Mankulam cave refers to a dealer of ploughshares. Rock inscriptions at Pulankurichi (5th-6th centuries) record transactions of certain tracts of land and the right to brahmadeya land for a Brahmin.

- ◆ Extensive foreign trade- Graeco-Roman coins

Extensive foreign trade in South India is evident from the discovery of Graeco-Roman coins. A large quantity of pre-Mauryan punch-marked coins and Roman coins were found in hoards throughout the region. Significant quantities of gold and silver coins, minted by Roman emperors from Augustus to Nero (54-68 BCE), were found in the interior Tamil land. It is believed that the coins were used as currency and exchanged for profit. The *Yavanas* in Muziris traded gold in return for pepper and rare products from the sea and hilly regions. There was a concentration of silver coins called *denari* in Tamil Nadu.

### 1.3.2 Early Historic Society and Culture

- ◆ Debates- existence of kingdom or chieftdom

The social formation comprised economic, social, political, and cultural interactions among different subsistence forms. Tamil poems exalted the *muventar*, the three ruling lineages of Chera, Pandya, and Chola, as great rulers of *Tamizhakam*. Most historians considered them as kings and symbols of state power. However, Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier argue that the absence of factors like taxation, organized militia, bureaucracy, and judico-political institutions suggests it was a pre-state chieftdom rather than a state system. Predatory campaigns, redistribution, gifts, and non-stratified societies were characteristics of early historical agro-pastoral social development, making state creation unlikely at that time.

- ◆ Kutti-domestic segment
- ◆ Clan settlements Ur
- ◆ Kinship based production

Irrespective of their means of subsistence, the inhabitants of *Tamizhakam* were divided into descent groups (*kuti*) and resided around clan settlements (*ur*). Each *ur* operated as an independent production system, relying on the labor of the relevant descent group (*kutimakkal*). It consisted of *kutis*, or independent production units. Kinship played a crucial role in labor division, even when different ecotypes had varied subsistence methods. Within *kuti*, *ilayar* (young) and *mutiyar* (old) individuals from kin and affinal relatives served as the primary labor force. The emphasis on familial labor eliminated the likelihood of observable social stratification. *Brahmana* houses, separate from kinship-based units, were scattered throughout the clan settlements of the chiefdoms, operating under a different system of productive ties.



- ◆ Three kinds of chieftains: *kilar*, *velir* and *ventar*

The *kilar* or headman, of each descent group shared and distributed resources from the *ur*. The complexity of this basic chieftain structure depended on population size and the extent of redistributive social ties. The ascending order of chieftains was *kilar*, *velir*, and *ventar*. *Velirs* controlled politically demarcated territories, and resource strength followed this order. However, there was no formal hierarchy of power distribution with a continuous line of political control from *kilar* to *ventar*. Chieftains at the *ventar* level supported Vedic ceremonies and adopted titles reflecting their patronage. Although conceptually distinct, stronger predatory campaigns required the allegiance of those below.

- ◆ Three *ventar*-Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas
- ◆ Control resources

The *ventar* lineages of Cheras, Cholas, and Pandyas established their dominance over multiple settlements in a region through predatory control and subjugation. They quickly became powerful ruling authorities without clan affiliations. These *ventar* chieftains possessed significant resources, likely aided by Roman trade connections, which allowed them to acquire horses, gold, silver, and other prestigious items as mentioned in poetry. Plundering served as the primary means of resource extraction for all types of chieftains, as it fell outside the realm of clan relations. Maintaining their high positions relied heavily on predation and the redistribution of loot as the main form of resource sharing.

- ◆ Emergence of new political relations

Gifts played a role in the exchange of services or products during ancient times as acts of favor and reciprocity. Such exchanges either fostered new political relationships or strengthened existing ones between the donor and recipient. Bards, mendicants, and warriors received various types of gifts, including gold.

- ◆ Reference to political structure

The *Patittuppattu* poems provide valuable information about the political structure and authority during the Sangam age. Cheras were praised for performing Vedic sacrifices (*velvi*), being devoted to the war goddess *Kottavai*, and worshiping the protector of Murugan. The ruler considered their subjects as children, reminiscent of the concept found in the second Edict of Ashoka, which compares the king's relationship with subjects to that of a parent and child.

A poem by Karikkannar of Kaveripoompattinam mentions the expansion of predatory control beyond the original *Ur* through the process of subjugation. Three methods were involved in this subjugation process: subordination with

- ◆ *Raid by Ventars*
- ◆ *Subjugation*

tributary obligations, expulsion, and marital alliances. The poems contain numerous references to these methods of enlarging the *ventar* domains. They illustrate how people in subjugated regions could maintain their bravery by offering a portion of their wealth as *tirai or kol* (tributes in kind) to the ventar. The *ventar* frequently resorted to raiding settlements to extract *tinai*.

- ◆ *The only institution of political character is Avaiyam or Sabha, assisting body of Ventar*

The structure of political power at the ventar level was characterized by extensive social relationships, creating the impression of sophistication. Middlemen, known as 'kilar' or 'mannar,' established a hierarchical relationship from the ventar to the kutimakkal, which went beyond kinship and distanced the ventar from the kutimakkal. However, the ventar did engage in social activities such as sharing alcoholic beverages and meals with the maravar in their homes during pre-raid or post-raid festivities. The only institution with political significance mentioned in the poems is the *Avaiyam* (Sabha), which seemed to function as an assisting body for the ventar. A structured polity with defined positions and functions could not emerge under a complex redistributive political economy based on raids. The members of this clan primarily consisted of *pulavar* scholars and warrior-chiefs. Although the portrayal of the muventar as crowned kings by bards had little to do with reality, it indicates their familiarity with the concept of kingship.

- ◆ *Resistance from the side of chieftains against the Ventars*

The Edicts of Ashoka referred to the Cheras not as individual rulers but as clans of kindred descendants, evident from expressions such as Satiyaputo and Keralaputo. There appears to be a discrepancy between the image attributed to the ventar by the poets and reality. The ventar did not have dominion over the entire *Tamizhakam*, as there were other tribute-receiving chiefs like Atiyaman who held a similar status to the *ventar*. Hill chieftains strongly resisted the ventar's authority, and among them, Pari of *Parampumalai* offered significant resistance but was eventually defeated and killed. Among the *velir* chieftains, the *Ay* chieftains (7<sup>th</sup> century CE) held control over the region from Kanyakumari to the northern part of Kerala up to Thiruvalla. Another *velir* chiefdom was Ezhimala in the north, and Nannan, celebrated in Tamil heroic poems as the ruler of the region comprising Coimbatore, Wayanad, and Gudalur, was the primary ruler of the chiefdom.

Exaggerations were present in Sangam literature regarding the territories dominated by the ventar. For example, some



- ◆ Exaggerated the power of Ventar

poems set the northern boundaries of each ventar as the Himalayas. However, in reality, the ventar were also chiefs, with the main difference being their greater resource power, larger intercommunity distributive relationships, and better access to cultural sources for legitimization compared to the *velir*. The *Brahmanas*, through Vedic traditions, and the *Panas*, through the composition of heroic songs, legitimized the power of the ventar. This was the situation of pre-state chiefdoms before the formation of a state system.

### 1.3.2.1 Concept of Tinai

- ◆ Tinai had three separate factors: Muthal, Kari and Uri

The concept of *Tinai*, frequently mentioned in classical Tamil songs, provides insight into the societal structure of ancient *Tamizhakam*. *Tinai* refers to the physiographic divisions or micro-eco-zones of ancient *Tamizhakam*. According to the Tamil songs, there were five *Tinais* in *Tamizhakam* (*Aintinai*). They were *Kurinji*, the hilly area; *Palai*, the parched zone; *Mullai*, the pastoral tract; *Marutham*, the wetland; and *Neital*, the coastal area. The songs of *Ettutokai* and *Pathupathu* confirm that each *Tinai* had three distinct factors known as *Muthal*, *Karu*, and *Uri*.

- ◆ Lives and culture of Kurinji, Mullai

The inhabitants of *Kurinji Tinai* were *Kanavar*, *Vetar*, and *Kuravar*. It was a hilly region, and the primary occupations of the inhabitants were hunting and food gathering. Horsegram and paddy were cultivated in the hill tracts of *Kurinji* through a form of shifting cultivation known as *Punam* cultivation. The deity associated with *Kurinji* was *Vel*. The main occupation in the *Mullai* region was cattle rearing and shifting cultivation. The inhabitants were *Idayar* and *Ayar*, and the chief deity of this *Tinai* was *Mayan*. It appears that people during this period used iron ploughshares, spears, and knives for cultivation.

- ◆ Way of lives in Marutham

Agriculture predominantly took place in the wetlands of *Marutham* during this period. The fertility of the area and the availability of water supported agricultural development. Well-irrigated agrarian tracts suitable for cultivating sugarcane and paddy were prevalent. The wetlands of *Marutham* were cultivated by *Uzhavar*, *Tozhuvar*, and *Kadaiyar*. The songs indicate that the cultivators in the *Marutham* area also produced food grains for the upper strata of society. Similarly, in the *Mullai* region, cattle rearing and shifting cultivation were the primary occupations. The inhabitants were *Idayar* and *Ayar*, and the chief deity was *Mayan*. Iron ploughshares, spears, and knives were used for cultivation during this period.

- ◆ *Livelihood in Palai, Neital*

The dry region of Palai Tinai did not support agricultural or cattle rearing activities. Consequently, the inhabitants resorted to plundering and robbery. The people of *Palai*, specifically the *Maravar* and *Kallar*, would rob traders from *Kurinji*, *Maravar*, and *Mullai*. The coastal region was known as *Neital*, inhabited by *Pallavar*, *Parathar*, *Minavar*, *Alvar*, *Alathiyar*, and others. Fishing and salt-making were their main occupations, along with crafts such as producing bangles made of conch shells.

- ◆ *New groups emerged*

With the introduction of ploughshares and the use of bullocks and buffaloes for ploughing, agricultural activities expanded into new areas. New social groups, like the *Adiyar*, emerged in these regions and began producing food grains for the chiefs and rulers. Several ethnographic groups, such as *panar*, *parayar*, *vettuvavar*, *kaniyan*, and others from different *Tinai*s, seem to have survived through the ages up to the modern period.

### 1.3.3. Expansion of Mode of Production

- ◆ *Sivathaby-mode of production in Tinai*

Conceptualising the socio-economic life during the Age of the Tamil heroic poems, K. Sivathamby argued that the *Tinai* represented a very basic form of the Asiatic mode of production. According to Marx, the Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP) referred to a self-sufficient village economy without private ownership of land. AMP was characterized by the absence of trade, urban development, and long-lasting stability.

- ◆ *Chieftains maintained their power through plunder*

Among various forms of production, agriculture using the combination plough was the most advanced in terms of technology and productivity. Agricultural land in *Tamilakam* was divided into *Vanpulam* (non-agricultural areas) and *Manpulam* (riverine agricultural wetlands), but the extent of the latter was limited to small tracts. Kinship formed the basis of production relations in all eco-zones. The recurring expression *ilayarum mutiyarum kilaiyutan tuvanri* in the poems signifies the division of labor within all *Tinai*s, with labor being shared among the young and old members of the agnatic kin. This demonstrates that kinship was the foundation of production relations. The calls for protecting agriculturists and promoting peace emerge as voices of dissent against this collective reality. Plunder raids were essential for the chieftains to maintain the redistributive economy of the time, and all major ideas and institutions served the purpose of legitimisation.



◆ *Sedentary agriculture*

Simultaneously, the significance of plough agriculture was seen as a matter of social recognition. The prevailing political structure of the period strongly indicates the dominance of the redistributive economy, while sedentary agriculture struggled to secure its conditions for development. This process generated a series of contradictions within the social formation. The most notable contradiction was the persistent existence of conditions that were unfavorable to the development of plough agriculture, despite its potential as the most advanced form of production during that time.

### 1.3.3.1 Sanskritisation and Stratification

◆ *Internal and external dynamics led to the segmentation*

There were significant variations in the economic conditions of the *Tinai*s as they employed different subsistence strategies in various ecological settings. They engaged in mutual interactions for subsistence and shared cultural practices. Additionally, according to Rajan Grukhal, external changes brought about by Brahmanical, Jain, and Buddhist influences, trade contacts, and the impact of the Mauryan state led to a social environment where class segmentation emerged within lineages, forming domestic groups that relied on different economies. The Sangam age was characterized by the Kinship mode of production relationship.

◆ *Replacement of kinship based production*

The transition away from the kinship-based production began with the *Brahmana* households, which were distinct from the independent and self-sustaining *Kutis* units under the leadership of *Kilar* and their clan ties with the people (*Kutimakkal*). In contrast, the Brahmanical institutions of redistribution and gift-giving favored the scholarly bards and Vedic priests, bringing about a radical change in production relations and labor conditions. This created two distinct classes for production relations: *Brahmana* landholders and non-*Brahmana* landholders. It introduced non-kin labor in a society where labor and kinship were interconnected, establishing a simple hierarchy without intermediaries in landownership.

◆ *Various rights and privileges related to land*

The new production relations and their institutionalised form are evident in rock inscriptions such as those found in Pulankurichi, which mention land transactions to *Brahmins* (*Brahmadeya*) and the rights, privileges, and obligations of landholders, leaseholders, and actual tillers. These records introduced the terms *miyatci* (superior rights of organising and controlling production) and *karanmai* (supervising rights), and the introduction of *karanmai* to the *kuti* led to the alienation of control over the means of production.

- ◆ Emergence of permanent workforce
- ◆ New political formation



The development of occupational specializations and their hierarchical arrangement was a result of the use of the ploughshare in agriculture and wet rice cultivation. The permanent workforce associated with the *Brahmin* households contributed to the hierarchical structure due to the stratified production system. The dominant position of the *Brahmins* played a crucial role in the *jati* hierarchy, supported by their ritual supremacy, resource potential, social control, political influence, and cultural skills. With the expansion of agrarian activities in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, a new agrarian system emerged, manifested in monarchies such as the Chola (Vijayalaya line), Pandya (Katunkon line), and Chera (Makotai line). This stratification reduced the *kutis* to mere tillers (*ulu-kuti*). The formation of social divisions between laborers and non-laborers necessitated a range of institutions to regulate and preempt class tensions. Thus, the social formation structured by the dominance of forest societies came to an end during the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## Summarised Overview

Tamil macro region should be considered a unified geographical and cultural zone. Our understanding of the economic and socio-political processes during that time is based on references found in Tamil heroic literature, Brahmi label inscriptions, foreign accounts, and numismatic evidence. The Tamil heroic poems provide insights into the socio-cultural practices of nature-dependent communities, with the majority of people being inhabitants of the forest.

The term *Sangam* refers to the assembly of Tamil poets based in Madurai. The geographical reality of the Sangam age is conveyed through the concept of *Aintinai*. *Kurinji* is a mountainous and forested region where hunting and gathering were the main occupations. *Mullai* represents pastoral land inhabited by agro-pastoralists. *Marutham* refers to cultivable wetlands where agriculture was the primary occupation, while *Neithal* represents the coastal region where fishing and salt manufacturing were prominent. *Palai* denotes the dry land where activities like theft and cattle lifting took place.

At the political level, social formation was characterised by tribal chiefdoms, small and large descent groups that held power. Our knowledge of the *Sangam* age primarily comes from Tamil heroic literature. The basic unit of the structure was the *Kuti*, with *Ur* headed by *Kilar*, *Malai* headed by *Velir*, and *Natu* headed by *Ventar*. Although not all of *Tamizhakam* belonged to the *Ventars*, they possessed greater resources, engaged in larger redistributive social relationships, and had better sources of legitimacy. Numerous minor chieftains, either independent or aligned with one of the *Ventar* (Chola, Chera, and Pandya), exerted predatory



control over the agrarian zones in their vicinity.

The dominance of forest culture and the tribal way of life persisted until a new social formation emerged, characterised by advanced wet-rice agriculture. This marked the establishment of new production relations that went beyond the framework of kinship. The notion of hierarchy became implicit in this new system of production, representing a turning point in terms of stratification and hierarchical ordering. Agrarian societies in *Tamizhakam* began to exhibit noticeable class structures. The creation of *Brahmadeya* lands, evident from inscriptions, resulted in the imposition of superior rights for the *Brahmins* over communal holdings. This political formation led to the development of the state system and authority structure. Clan-kin ties disintegrated, and specialisation widened the division of labor. Consequently, clan identities disappeared, and *Jati* emerged as a substitute. The new political formation under the Pallavas, Chera, Chola, and Pandyas was associated with the emergence of an agrarian society linked to royal patronage. The social formation dominated by forests came to an end during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## Self Assessment

1. What you mean by *Sangam*?
2. What do you mean by *Aintinai*?
3. Name the important *Sangam* works.
4. Who wrote the work *Tirukkural*?
5. What do you know about *Arikamedu*?
6. Which rock inscription mentioned about the land transfer to the *Brahmins*?
7. Differentiate *kuti* and *Ur*?
8. Mention *Vanpulam* and *Manpulam*.
9. What is *Brahmadeya* land?
10. What are *Miyatci* and *Karanmai*?

## Assignments

1. Examine the geographical and cultural dimensions of *Tinai* in Ancient *Tamizhakam*.
2. Discuss the main sources for the study of *Sangam* period.
3. Briefly explain the political life of the *Sangam* age.
4. Discuss the nature of economy of *Sangam* age and mention the change



occurred after the introduction of ploughshare in agriculture.

5. Brahmanical institutions replace kins based production units to labour oriented. Substantiate.

## Suggested Readings

1. K. Sivathamby, *Studies in Ancient Tamil Society: Economy, Society, and State Formation*, New Century Book House, 1998.
2. Rajan Gurukkal, *Social Formations of Early South India*, Oxford, New Delhi, 2012.

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1. *Annual Session: Tamil Nadu History Congress*, Dept of History University of Madras.
2. K. Sivathamby, *Studies in Ancient Tamil Society: Economy, Society, and State Formation*, New Century Book House, 1998.
3. Kailasapathy, *Tamil Heroic Poetry*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1968.
4. Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Poetry 2000 Years Ago*, *Tamil Culture*, Vol.X, 1979.
5. N Athiyaman, *Subsistence Pattern in Early Historic Tamilnadu*, Presidential Address, 25th New Century Book House, October 2018.



## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



# Exchanges and Trade

## Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ♦ review the long distance trade in early Kerala
- ♦ find out the importance of the archaeological excavations at Pattanam and Vizhinjam
- ♦ examine early urbanisation in Kerala
- ♦ analyse the earliest exchanges between Rome and Tamil region

## Background

Kerala has historically been a region of immigrants. When the megalithic people occupied the land, the Stone Age people either vanished or migrated to the mountains. The immigrants primarily consisted of cowherds who came for trade rather than grazing purposes. These cowherd traders arrived on the west coast to exchange goods with navigators from the north. It is a well-known fact that Malainadu had trade connections with West Asia and Egypt in the 3rd millennium BCE, as discussed in previous units. Foreigners such as the Arabs, Assyrians, Babylonians, Phoenicians, Jews, Greeks, Romans, and Chinese had interactions with the Kerala coast during ancient times. This unit aims to analyse these historical connections.

## Keywords

Pattanam, Vizhinjam, Urbanisation, Indo-Roman Trade, Archaeological excavation, Muziris.

## Discussion

### 1.4.1 Long Distance Trade – River and Oceans

The early Sangam works also include mentions of voyages made by the people of Kerala to foreign countries.



◆ Flourishing trade- Sangam works and foreign accounts

In *Patittupattu*, the poetess Kakkai Patiniyar talks about the Chera ships sailing across the ocean to acquire wealth from foreign lands. Kerala played a leading role in the maritime trade of South India. Paranaar, a great poet of the Sangam Age, describes the large ships of a chieftain named Veliyan traveling abroad to bring back gold. *Pattinapalai* provides a detailed account of the thriving trade in Kaveripoompattinam, which served as the early capital of the Cholas. *Silapadikaram* and *Manimekhalai* mention Puhar, Kanchipuram, and Madurai, which exported high-quality wool and cotton through the Coromandel coast. The writings of Greco-Roman geographers offer evidence of extensive commercial exchange of resources. G.W.B. Hunting Ford noted that Arikamedu was a hub for Roman trade in the 1st century BCE, particularly in muslin clothing, terracotta objects, and jewelry made of precious and semi-precious beads.

◆ Important ancient sea ports- Muziris, Tyndis, Barace and Nelcynda

The most significant ancient seaports were Muziris, Tyndis, Barace, and Nelcynda. Muziris served as the gateway to ancient India and not only facilitated trade for Phoenicians, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans in succession but also provided refuge for the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities, who greatly enriched Kerala's cultural heritage. Paranaar also mentions the bustling pepper trade at the port of Muziris. Tyndis was the second most important port. The author of the *Periplus* describes it as "a large village near the coast." Scholars have identified it with Kadalundi, Ponnani, and Pantalayani Kollam. Over time, it gained prominence as a seaport town.

◆ Barace identified with Purakkad and Kottanora

Barace, located south of Muziris, was a major trading center known for its safety from pirates. Some scholars associate Barace with Purakkad and Kottanora. Another port mentioned by early classical writers, situated south of Muziris, is Nelcynda. Mantai is another significant ancient seaport highlighted in ancient Tamil works. In later periods, other ports in Kerala gained importance, such as Quilon, Calicut, and Cochin. Calicut only became a significant port from the 13th or 14th century onward, with the arrival of the Portuguese towards the end of the 15th century. Cochin, on the other hand, experienced greater commercial and political prominence, and the subsequent conflicts between European powers in Kerala revolved around this port.

### 1.4.2 Archaeological Testimonies for Long Distance Trade

- ◆ 13 sites – punch marked and Roman coins

The Kerala coast is believed to have played a significant role in the alleged export of wild flora and fauna products to the Red Sea coast and the Graeco-Roman world in ancient times. Among these, thirteen sites provide numismatic evidence, including several hoards of punch-marked and Roman coins found in various locations in Tamizhakam.

- ◆ Graeco-Roman trade contact and system of exchange

Classical Greco-Roman accounts mention contemporary trade centers and ports in peninsular India. *Natural History* and *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* offer detailed lists of imports and exports, marketplaces and trading posts, as well as ports and port towns. Copper and a few alloy minerals like tin and lead appear to have been imported. It is highly likely that the Greeks, Persians, and Arabs, who were the primary traders, themselves collected, processed, and sometimes even manufactured certain goods they shipped to Rome. The role of local merchants in maritime trade seems to have been relatively insignificant, acting mainly as intermediaries. Therefore, the Graeco-Roman trade contacts in Tamizhakam primarily involved a “goods for goods” exchange system, with the main difference being the exchange of goods for prestigious items like gold and silver coins.

- ◆ Roman trade declined from the third century

In fact, Roman gold and silver steadily flowed into South India in exchange not only for spices but also for muslin, silk, and other luxurious items. The discovery of Roman coins in many parts of Kerala attests to the extensive reach of Roman trade connections. Pepper comprised the majority of the cargo shipped westward from Kerala. However, direct trade between Kerala and Rome declined from the 3rd century CE onwards.

#### 1.4.2.1 Pattanam and Vizhinjam Excavations

##### Vizhinjam

- ◆ Vizhinjam-natural port and trading centre

Vizhinjam is a small village located approximately fifteen kilometers south of Trivandrum. The region has a rich historical heritage, being an integral part of ancient *Tamizhakam*, and has played a significant role in the history of South India as a natural port and trading center. During the 8th century, Vizhinjam reached its pinnacle of splendor and became a prominent center for learning and culture. Its unique cultural identity is a result of its illustrious and



magnificent historical legacy. It is believed that the later Ay kings, who ruled South India in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, made Vizhinjam their capital, further cementing its importance in Kerala's political history as a major seaport and trading hub in ancient times.

◆ *Epigraphical evidences- invasion of Vizhinjam*

There is epigraphical evidence regarding Vizhinjam's history. The village was conquered by various dynasties, including the Pandya, Chera, and Chola, with the Pandya dynasty being the first to rule over it. It appears that during both the early historic and medieval periods, Vizhinjam was a significant part of the Pandya kingdom. Scholars such as Gopinatha Rao and K.A. Nilakanta Sastri agree that Nedumchadayan invaded Venad and destroyed Vizhinjam, which was the stronghold of the Cheras. However, the Trivandrum Museum Plates contradict this and state that Nedumchadayan was defeated at Vizhinjam.

◆ *Prosperous trade*

Vizhinjam, previously known as Vilinda, Vilinam, or Vilunum according to Tamil epigraphs from the medieval era, served as the capital of Malainadu. When the Cholas conquered Vizhinjam, it underwent name changes, becoming *Rajendra Chola Pattanam* and *Kolutongacholapattanam*, as evidenced by inscriptions. An inscription at the Trivikramangalam Maha Vishnu Temple in Thamalam, Thiruvananthapuram, provides valuable information about the thriving trade and merchants in Vizhinjam.

◆ *Sangam literature reference to Vizhinjam*

The Madras Museum Copper Plates of Pandya King Nedunchadaiyan, also known as Jatilavarman, mention the Vilinjam fort in epigraphic references, indicating that Vilinjam was under the governance of the Ay dynasty. The Vizhinjam Port is additionally mentioned in the Thiruvallangadu Copper Plates of Rajendra Chola, which date back to 1016-17 CE. Various original sources, including Sangam literature, early Tamil writings from the ninth and tenth centuries such as *Pandikkovai* and *Iraiyanar Ahapporul Urai*, as well as Jayamkondar's *Kallingattup-parani*, *Kulottunga-solan-pillai-tamil*, and *Vikarama-solan-ula*, also make reference to the fort and harbour at Vizhinjam.

### **Description of Vizhinjam by Early Travelers**

Vizhinjam has been documented by early historians and travelers in their journey diaries. The first reference to Vizhinjam as "a village with a natural deep sea", situated north of Kanyakumari, previously known as *Comari* was made by a Greek visitor in his work *The Periplus of the*

◆ Foreign accounts of Vizhinjam

*Erythraean Sea* in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. It was recognized as Balita and described as a harbor facilitating maritime trade. The *Peutinger Tables* also mentioned Vizhinjam, which they believed to be *Blinca*, a coastal town close to *Comari*. This clearly indicates that Vizhinjam was a flourishing coastal town with a port that had been utilized for international maritime trade since ancient times.

◆ Relocation of Pandyas to Vizhinjam

The evidence overwhelmingly suggests that during the Sangam Age, the regions south of Thiruvalla were governed by the Ays. According to Attur Krishna Pisharadi's introduction to *Lilathilakam*, in the 8th century, the Pandyas conquered the Ayar family who held power in Aykudi. Speculation suggests that they may have relocated to Vizhinjam. At that time, Vizhinjam had an arsenal, and an officer named Srivallabha Perumpanaikam is recorded as being in charge of it. The fact that the land became the primary target of outside attacks when entering Kerala is evidence of its political significance. Ancient inscriptions refer to the location as *Kula Vizhinjam* or *Kulapuri*. The Ay kings Karunantadakkan and Varaguna established complex systems for effective administration in Kulapuri. Vizhinjam's capital city was adorned with forts, beautiful structures, captivating temples, well-developed highways, trading centers, and more.

◆ Excavations at Vizhinjam

The maritime history of Kerala is well-documented in texts, but archaeological evidence is relatively scarce. Excavations at Vizhinjam began in 1997, and the archaeology department of the University of Kerala, led by Dr. Ajit Kumar, initiated recent archaeological investigations at Vizhinjam in 2006. Monuments and sculptures discovered during these excavations provide historical evidence for the fort and port city of Vizhinjam, which existed from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. In Vizhinjam, the fort area is known as Kottappuram and Marunukotta, with *kotta* meaning fort in the local language. Marunukotta, located in the Mathilpuram-Cherumanal region, also signifies a "walled area" etymologically. The locals believed that the region, called *Marunukotta*, was abundant in medicinal plants due to its proximity to the sea. The inscriptions related to the Ay fort in early literature have been convincingly associated with these two fort positions in Vizhinjam. The presence of a *Kappalchal*, which allows water to enter and exit, indicates the existence of a port and a passage for ships to enter the channel.

The excavations have revealed a vast collection of



◆ *Vast collection of relics excavated*

artifacts that provide new insights into Vizhinjam's early history. The earliest documented object from Vizhinjam is a gold coin believed to be from the reign of Ptolemy II or Philadelphos, who ruled Egypt from 285-246 BCE. The early red ware found in Vizhinjam, which dates back to the early historic period and was spread through maritime trade, consists of embossed or paddled red pottery. The presence of rouletted ware and torpedo jar shards (dating from the 4th to the 7th centuries and originating from West Asia) confirms the ancient history and antiquity of Vizhinjam as a port town. The discovery of egg shell pottery, traced back to Iraq, and pottery remnants from East Asia further contribute to the site's cultural significance. Chinese ceramics found at the site include plain white items, blue on white items, celadon items, and pale yellow cracked items with blue paintings. The pale green celadon shards date back to the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. Fragments of Dutch and British porcelain or tableware indicate that Vizhinjam maintained ongoing relations with Europe until the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

◆ *3 cultural eras*

The site exhibits three distinct cultural periods: early historic (1<sup>st</sup> century CE), late medieval, and modern. The faunal assemblage discovered at the excavation site indicates that animals such as cattle or buffalo, goat or sheep, hare, dog, cat, bandicoot rat, birds, turtles, and mollusks were present in Vizhinjam during that time. The primary sources of food in Vizhinjam were fish, molluscan shells, and cuttlefish, reflecting the region's food economy.

◆ *Township and commercial centers*

Based on the relevant archaeological investigations conducted at Vizhinjam, it is confirmed that it was one of the earliest historical towns and commercial centers along the southern coast of Kerala. This validates the early travelogues that described and were closely associated with the flourishing international maritime trade in the Indian Ocean. The significance of Vizhinjam has been praised by early historians because of the presence of an ancient Fort and Port, and research has uncovered its archaeological and historical importance. The excavations and academic studies conducted there have revealed the strategic and maritime significance of Vizhinjam, which played a pivotal role as a state capital and a hub for maritime trade during that era. The natural deep-sea harbor of Vizhinjam also attracted colonial powers. The Travancore monarchs and subsequent governments constructed a port at Vizhinjam due to its suitability for maritime activities.

## Pattanam Excavations

- ◆ Evidence of Urban habitation
- ◆ Industrial character of site



Pattanam, located in the Ernakulam district of Kerala state, was an ordinary village until the Kerala Council for Historical Research (KCHR) initiated excavations there in 2007. The archaeological mound of Pattanam holds a history of approximately 3000 years, starting around 1000 BCE. Most of the discovered artifacts belong to the Early Historic period (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to 5<sup>th</sup> century CE). These artifacts and findings strongly suggest that Pattanam was likely the ancient Muziris or *Muciri Pattinam*, which was referred to as an important port in classical Tamil, Greek, and Latin sources within the maritime networks of that time. The discoveries made at Pattanam reveal the significant role played by the Indian subcontinent in transforming the Indian Ocean into a thriving trading hub. Prior to these findings, there was limited information available about Kerala's history before the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. The presence of well-crafted charred bricks, bathroom fixtures, roofing tiles, ring wells, and the spatial layout of structures indicates the existence of urban settlements at the site around 2000 years ago. The wide range of technological expertise, including metallurgy, lapidary work, cotton weaving, and terracotta production, further highlights the site's industrial nature.

- ◆ Multi-cultural site
- ◆ 5 cultural periods



The significance of Pattanam lies in its remarkable demonstration of how the local inhabitants effectively utilized both land and sea to facilitate cultural exchanges across oceans. These settlers were known for their technological advancements, skilled craftsmanship, impressive architecture, and abundant natural resources. Appropriately named the "Mound of Crossings," Pattanam derives its name from the Prakrit language, where *Pattinam* signifies a ferry, port, or commercial location. The location and physical evidence discovered at Pattanam strongly suggest that it may have played a vital role in the legendary port of *Muciri Pattinam* or Muziris, which is extensively documented in Indian and European classical literature. However, its significance should not be limited to that alone. Muziris seems to have served as a central hub within the broader process of urbanisation along the Indian Ocean coastline, connecting the peninsular Indian region (*Tamizhakam*) with trans-oceanic networks. Archaeologists classify Pattanam as a multicultural site due to its occupation over several centuries and different historical periods. The excavation layers, consisting of approximately 4 meters of accumulated deposits, have been divided into five distinct

cultural periods: Iron Age (c. 1000 BCE - 500 BCE), Iron Age-Early Historic transition (c. 500 BCE - 300 BCE), Early Historic (c. 300 BCE - 500 CE), Medieval (c. 500 CE - 1500 CE), and Modern (c. 1500 CE onwards).

◆ *Trade relation with the outside world before Roman era*

Throughout its rich history spanning three millennia, Pattanam, as it is known today, had established connections with the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean littorals (from East Africa to the South China region), as well as other parts of the Indian subcontinent. Pattanam holds a special significance as it had interactions with the outside world even before the Roman era. Fragmentary remains of torpedo and ovoid jars, turquoise-glazed pottery, and frankincense crumbs from South Arabia and Mesopotamia provide evidence of Pattanam's connections to the Pre-Roman, Roman, and Post-Roman periods between 300 BCE and 1000 CE.

◆ *Relation of Pattanam with other regions*

The site contains numerous artifacts that serve as ample proof of Pattanam's links to the Mediterranean between 100 BCE and 500 CE. These include *amphorae*, *terra sigillata*, *intaglios*, cameo blanks, fragments of Roman glass, and Roman game counters. The presence of Blue and White pottery and other Chinese artifacts further indicates Pattanam's commercial connections with the eastern regions of the Indian Ocean between 1500 and 1900 CE. Therefore, over a significant period of its history (from 1000 BCE to CE 2000), ceramics, inlays, *intaglios*, cameo-blanks, gold jewelry, copper coins, spices, and gemstones all testify to Pattanam's trading ties with the Indian subcontinent and beyond.

◆ *Storage facility and transit point*

Some of these goods may have been produced in Pattanam, while the town itself could have functioned as a storage facility or a point of transit for other commodities, such as spices and natural resources from the surrounding area. Ports like Guangzhou and Quanzhou in South China, Khao Sam Kaeo in the Upper Thai-Malay Peninsula, Tamralipti, Arikamedu, Korkai, and Alagankulam in Tamil Nadu, Tissamaharama and Manthai in Sri Lanka, Barygaza in Bharuch, Gujarat, Ormara in Pakistan, Teredon in Basra, Iraq, and Gerrha in Al Ahsa, Saudi Arabia, have been identified as contemporaries of Pattanam during the historic period, indicating its potential trade connections with them.

### 1.4.3 Early Urbanisation – Muziris, Vizhinjam, Kollam, Pantalayani Kollam

- ◆ Urbanization-stimulated by external trade

Urbanization in South India was driven by external trade, particularly the maritime trade between the Mediterranean and South India. Urban centers developed in both the plains (*Marutham*) and the coastal areas (*Neital Tinai*). These urban centers were characterised by their multicultural nature, influenced by the Classical Roman Empire. Additionally, local markets emerged to cater to the needs of the surrounding regions.

#### Muziris

- ◆ Spice trading hub

The history of Muziris, also known as *Muciri Pattanam*, dates back to the early third millennium BC. During this time, Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians traveled to the Malabar coast in search of spices. Later, Arabs and Phoenicians joined these Middle Eastern communities. Muziris, located in Kodungallur, gradually gained prominence in global trade. It holds great significance in Kerala's ancient history as a major trade route. Muziris served as a historic port and played a central role in Kerala's development as a significant spice trading hub. According to Sangam literature, Roman ships carrying gold would arrive at Muziris to exchange it for pepper. The *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* also mentions that Muziris could be reached from Red Sea ports in Egypt within 14 days, relying on the monsoon winds.

- ◆ Magnificent market place, surrounded by warehouse and bazaars

Both Ptolemy and the author of the *Periplus* describe Muziris as a magnificent marketplace. The bustling city had numerous ships of different sizes and was surrounded by expansive bazaars, vast warehouses, royal residences, and places of worship. Various goods were imported, including coins, topaz, lightweight fabrics, patterned linens, antimony, coral, crude glass, copper, tin, lead, and wine. Pepper was the main export, along with pearls, ivory, silk cloth, spikenard from the Ganges, *malabathrum* from the interior, transparent gemstones, diamonds, sapphires, and tortoise shells.

- ◆ Busiest port till flood of 1341

As Muziris drew the attention of various nationalities, including the Chinese, it maintained its commercial prosperity. Muziris remained the busiest port for foreign trade along the Kerala coast. However, in 1341, the port faced a setback due to significant floods in the Periyar River. These floods blocked the mouth of Muziris harbor, leading to its decline and the emergence of Cochin's port as a prominent rival.



## Vizhinjam

- ◆ *Historical township and commercial centre*

We have covered the importance of Vizhinjam in the previous section. Archaeological investigations confirm that Vizhinjam was one of the earliest townships and commercial centers along Kerala's southern coast. This validates the accounts found in early travelogues, which highlight its involvement in the thriving international maritime trade in the Indian Ocean. The coins and diverse pottery found in Egypt demonstrate its extensive maritime connections. Vizhinjam's trading activities flourished during the Ays and Chola periods.

## Kollam

- ◆ *Hub for transmarine trade*

Kollam, also known as *Kurakenikollam* and the capital of Venad, held significant importance as a trading center on the Malabar Coast. It served as a gathering place for foreigners and a hub for transmarine trade. Traders from China and the Middle East focused their efforts in Kollam, while the traders from Kaveripattinam directed their attention here. Arab ships traveling to China have been stopping at Kollam since the ninth century. Kollam was not a fully developed urban center but rather a specific area with concentrated commercial activities. The expansion of royal patronage accelerated the growth of the existing nagaram into more advanced levels of trade and marketing. This is evident from the increased involvement of the royal authority in the market, including the regulation of commodity prices, weights and measures, imposition of duties on goods entering and leaving the market (equivalent to one-sixth of the prices), and the collection of entrance and exit fees for vehicles. The use of coined money played a crucial role in trade and other economic activities during that time, as described in the *Tarisappalli* Copper Plate. There was a definite shift towards organized monetization, with a four *Kasu* entry charge for vehicles and a two *Kasu* charge for boats. Additionally, weighing fees (*tularkuli*) and customs duties were imposed on imported goods.

- ◆ *Economic prosperity*

The economic prosperity of this commercial hub was enhanced by the influx of Chinese goods to the Malabar coast, especially to Kollam. The Sung government of China prohibited the export of gold and other precious metals to the Malabar Coast.

## Pantalayani Kollam

Pantalayani Kollam, situated north of Calicut, does not hold any significance in contemporary commerce networks.

- ◆ Commercial Hub

However, during the medieval era, it flourished as a bustling commercial center for several centuries. Arab travelers of the Middle Ages referred to Pantalayani Kollam as Fadrina. Idrissi mentions the prosperity of the city's inhabitants due to thriving trade. Foreigners, including Christians and Jews, also engaged in trade with Fadrina. The main exports from Pantalayani Kollam were pepper and cardamom.

- ◆ Pliny- Rome had extensive trade with Kerala

#### 1.4.4 Indo-Roman Trade – Myth and Reality

In ancient literature and texts, the term *Yavanas* referred specifically to Greeks, but later it came to encompass all foreigners. During the closing centuries of the 1st Century BCE, the Greeks and Romans engaged in extensive trade with Kerala. Dioscorides, the Greek physician and contemporary of Pliny, mentioned spices such as cardamom, cinnamon, turmeric, and pepper in his *Materia Medica* for their medicinal properties. The discovery of the monsoon winds by Hippalus in 45 CE facilitated trade between Kerala and the West.

- ◆ Pepper- important export

In fact, South India witnessed a steady inflow of Roman gold and silver in exchange not only for spices but also for muslin, silk, and other luxurious goods. The poems describing trade relations with Greeks and Romans, as well as the writings of Strabo, Pliny, and Ptolemy, provide remarkable accounts of this. Roman coins minted by various emperors, from Augustus to Nero, have been discovered in the interior regions of Tamil Nadu. The presence of Roman coins in many parts of Kerala indicates the widespread nature of Roman trade connections. Pepper constituted the majority of the cargo transported from Kerala to the West.

- ◆ Information about Roman empire and India

*Yavanas* brought wrought lamps and wine bottles to India and also imported horses to the Pandya kingdom by sea. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* provides information on trade relations between India and the Roman Empire, mentioning that both transmarine and inland traders from distant places like Rome and the Gangetic valley engaged in exchange with the Sangam Age. The book also mentions ports such as Tyndis and Muziris.

According to Rajan Gurukkal, there is no clear evidence of direct trade between Rome and the Tamil region. The evidence suggests the arrival of foreign traders, particularly Greeks and Arabs, with their vessels for goods. Similar to internal trade relations, long-distance exchanges were based on the principle of use-value rather than exchange value. Roman currency was widely used in these transactions, but



- ◆ *Rajan Gurukkal- no clear evidence of direct trade*

primarily as a valuable item for status and ranking, rather than as a means of payment or measure of value. The direct trade between Kerala and Rome declined from the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE onwards following the decline of the Roman Empire.

## Summarised Overview

Kerala has maintained connections with other countries since ancient times. The Arabs, Assyrians, Babylonians, Phoenicians, Israelites, Greeks, Romans, and Chinese were among the foreign peoples who interacted with Kerala's shores in antiquity. These early interactions were mostly commercial in nature. Kerala has been known as the land of spices since the third millennium BCE, and it was this reputation that attracted foreigners and their cultures to its shores. The Assyrians and Babylonians traded extensively for cardamom and cinnamon from the Kerala coast starting from the 3rd century BCE. Egyptians also exported pepper, cinnamon, and cardamom from Kerala.

The Arabs and Phoenicians were among the first traders in spices. It is likely that the Arabs from Oman and the Persian Gulf region made the first significant voyages to the Kerala coast and other parts of the East. Cinnamon from Kerala may have first reached the Middle East through the Arabs. Some scholars argue that trade exchanges between South and North India existed as early as the Indus Valley civilization in the 3rd millennium BCE, and various goods traveled from the south to the Indus Valley. During the first three centuries of the Christian era, trade between the Roman Empire and the East expanded significantly, both overland and by sea.

There is an argument that the Chinese had trade relations with Kerala even before the Romans, and they came for pepper from the Chera Port and established their colony. The discovery of Chinese coins from the 1st century BCE suggests that trade with China began before the Christian era.

Classical authors such as Pliny, the anonymous author of the Periplus, and Ptolemy provide comprehensive accounts of the seaports that Kerala used to maintain trade and cultural ties with other nations during the early Christian period. The most important ports were Muziris, Tyndis, Barace, and Nelcynda. Muziris served as the gateway to ancient India and acted as a center for trade for Phoenicians, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. The Sangam literature and foreign accounts attest to the flourishing port of Muziris, with its surrounding warehouses and bazaars. Vizhinjam was one of the first historical townships in Kerala and a thriving commercial town. Archaeological evidence shows extensive trade relations between Vizhinjam and Egypt, West Asia, and China.

Excavations in Pattanam and Vizhinjam have revealed the prosperity of these ancient ports and townships in Kerala. Vizhinjam's natural deep sea allowed for the passage of larger ships at that time. A channel of a dead river from a previous era served as a natural anchoring yard in Vizhinjam, providing a calm resting place for foreign ships. Vizhinjam was a wealthy region, with its economic strength coming from the spice trade, especially pepper. Pattanam, located in central Kerala, was a unique multicultural archaeological site on the southwest coast of the Indian subcontinent. It witnessed vibrant cultural and commercial contacts reflected in technological, metallurgical, literary, and artistic advancements. Thus, it can be concluded that Pattanam was a prosperous urban center that existed from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE to the 5th century CE.

The trade relationship between South India and the Roman Empire before the Christian era was mentioned in Sangam poems and foreign accounts. Archaeological evidence, such as coins, has been recovered from various sites. Tamil poems and classical authors stated that the *Yavanas* in Muziris exchanged gold for pepper and other valuable products. Large quantities of gold and silver coins minted by Roman emperors have been found in the Tamil region. There is a difference of opinion regarding Roman trade with Kerala. Historians like Rajan Gurukkal argue that the evidence suggests foreign traders, particularly Greek and Arab traders, arrived on their vessels in search of goods.

## Self Assessment

1. Name the major ports of ancient Kerala.
2. Name the works of foreign travellers which give detailed accounts of the maritime trade in Kerala.
3. What is the epigraphical evidence related to Vizhinjam?
4. In which year the archaeological excavation at Vizhinjam started?
5. What do you know about the industrial character of Pattanam?
6. What does the word 'Pattanam' denote?
7. Mention the five cultural periods unearthed in Pattanam.
8. What are the artefacts recovered from Pattanam in relation to maritime trade?



## Assignments

1. Review the maritime trade that took place in ancient *Tamizhakam*.
2. Bring out the importance of the Pattanam and Vizhinjam excavations.
3. Explain the early phase of urbanisation in Kerala.
4. Discuss the debates on Indo-Roman trade.
5. What are the sources for the study of trade relations of the Tamil region during the ancient period?

## Suggested Readings

1. A.SreedharaMenon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2007.
2. K.Sivasankaran Nair, *Early History of Kerala upto A.D. 1500*, International Centre for Kerala Studies, University of Kerala, Kariavattom, 2010.
3. T.K.Gangadharan, *History of Kerala*, Calicut University, Central Co-operative Stores Ltd, Calicut University, 2010.

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1. Arundhati Chowdhury (ed.), *Unearthing Pattanam Histories*, Cultures, Crossings, National Museum, New Delhi, Kerala Council for Historical Research, 2014.
2. K.S.Mathew (ed.), *Imperial Rome, Indian Ocean and Muziris*, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, Delhi, 2015.
3. P.J.Chериан, *Perspectives On Kerala History*, Kerala Gazetteers, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999.
4. Pius Melekandathil, *Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Polity In The Indian Ocean*, Primus Books, 2010.



## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



# Early Medieval Socio- Political Formations

**BLOCK-02**



# Early Medieval Society

## Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner would be able to:

- ♦ analyze and interpret various sources used for the reconstruction of early medieval society in Kerala.
- ♦ evaluate and critically examine the historiographic approaches and critiques related to the study of early medieval society in Kerala.
- ♦ understand the historical significance and implications of the emergence of *Nadu* as a political and administrative unit in medieval Kerala.
- ♦ assess the impact of land grants and the alienation of rights on the social, economic, and political dynamics of early medieval Kerala society.

## Background

The study of Early Medieval Society in Kerala encompasses a complex web of interrelated factors that shaped the lives of people during that time. To gain a deeper understanding of this era, historians delve into a wide range of sources that provide nuanced insights into the social, cultural, and economic dynamics. These sources enable us to explore not only the broad historical trends but also the everyday experiences of individuals and communities.

Land grants, royal edicts, and legal decrees shed light on the distribution of land, property rights, taxation systems, and the governance structure. These documents illuminate the relationship between the ruling elite, the aristocracy, and the common people, offering insights into issues of land ownership, tenancy, and social obligations. Religious texts and temple inscriptions are vital sources for comprehending the religious beliefs, rituals, and social roles during the Early Medieval period. Temple inscriptions, in particular, provide information about the endowments made by rulers, nobles, and commoners, highlighting the interplay between religion, patronage, and societal relationships.

Material culture and archaeological evidence provide tangible remnants of Early Medieval Society. Excavations of settlements, fortifications, and urban



centers yield artifacts, tools, pottery, and architectural remains that contribute to our understanding of daily life, technology, and urban planning. The analysis of material culture enables us to explore aspects like craftsmanship, artistic styles, agricultural practices, and the material conditions of different social groups.

Beyond inscriptions and archaeological evidence, the study of Early Medieval Society in Kerala is enriched by exploring literary works. These texts, including poems, chronicles, and historical narratives, offer captivating insights into the socio-cultural dynamics, courtly life, religious practices, and social customs of the era.

## Keywords

*Nadu, Naduvazhi, Sasanam, Subinfeudation, Alienation of rights, Marumakkathayam, Janmi system, Samuthiri, Nadapura, Land grants*

## Discussion

### 2.1.1 Sources for Reconstruction

- ◆ Sources for the study of Medieval Kerala

By integrating and interpreting the diverse sources, historians can construct a multifaceted narrative of Early Medieval Society in Kerala. This holistic approach allows a deeper exploration of social hierarchies, gender roles, economic systems, cultural practices, and the interactions between different communities. Through the study of the sources, we gain a richer understanding of the complexities, continuities, and changes that characterized early medieval society in Kerala.

#### 2.1.1.1 Inscriptions

- ◆ Information provided by inscriptions

Inscriptions found on stone, copper plates, and temple walls provide crucial information about rulers, political administration, land grants, religious endowments, and social hierarchies. These epigraphic records offer insights into the power structures, religious patronage, and land ownership patterns of the time.

The Paliyam Copper Plate Inscription provides valuable information about the early rulers of Kerala, their titles, and territorial boundaries. It also mentions the construction

◆ Significance of Copper Plate inscriptions

of irrigation tanks and land grants made by the ruler. The Vazhappally Copper Plate Inscription is a significant example that records land grants by the rulers to temples and *Brahmins*. The Thiruvanchikulam Temple Inscription reveals details about the offerings made to the temple, festivals celebrated, and the social roles played by different communities in religious activities. The Tiruvalla Inscription provides insights into the local governance structure and the duties of officials. Copper plate inscriptions like the Kottayam Thaliyil Sasanam document land grants made to *Brahmins*, temples, and village communities. They outline the conditions and privileges associated with these grants, as well as the agricultural practices and revenue collection methods employed.

◆ Patronage and endowments to temples

Temple inscriptions offer glimpses into religious and cultural practices. The Ezhimala Inscription provides details about the endowments made to the Ezhimala Temple, including offerings, festivals, and the role of the temple in socio-religious life. The Thrissur Temple Inscription mentions the patronage of the Kochi rulers towards temple festivals.

◆ Taliparamba Copper Plates  
◆ Chengannur Inscription

Inscriptions like the Taliparamba Copper Plates shed light on the social structure and hierarchies in ancient Kerala. They mention the privileges, rights, and obligations of different communities, including *Brahmins* and local assemblies. The Chengannur Inscription provides insights into the roles of women in religious rituals. Inscriptions, be they on stone, copper plates, or temple walls, serve as vital gateways to the history of Kerala. Examples such as the Paliyam Copper Plate, Vazhappally *Sasanam*, and Ezhimala Inscription provide concrete evidence of the valuable insights that inscriptions offer. Through the meticulous study and interpretation of these epigraphic records, historians continue to unravel the intriguing stories of ancient Kerala and deepen our understanding of its vibrant history.

### 2.1.1.2 Literary Works

◆ Socio cultural dynamics of medieval Kerala

Literary texts, such as poems, chronicles, and historical narratives, offer valuable glimpses into the socio-cultural aspects of early medieval society. Works like the *Ramacharitam* and *Manipravalam* literature provide details about courtly life, religious practices, social customs, and the worldview of the period.

This epic poem *Ramacharitam* composed by the 14th-century



- ◆ *Ramacharitam*- the valorization of kingship
- ◆ *Manipravalam*-blend of Sanskrit and Malayalam

poet Cheeraman depicts the life of Lord Rama, emphasizing devotion, morality, and dharma. It sheds light on religious beliefs, the valorization of kingship, and the ideals upheld by the ruling elite. *Manipravalam* refers to literary works composed in a blend of Sanskrit and Malayalam. Works like the *Champu Ramayanam* by Thunchaththu Ezhuthachan and *Krishnagatha* by Cherusseri Nambuthiri showcase the fusion of linguistic styles, religious themes, and courtly aesthetics. They provide insights into courtly life, social hierarchies, and the cultural milieu of the time.

- ◆ *Historical narratives Chronicles*

This medieval Malayalam chronicle *Keralolpathi* traces the mythical origins and early history of Kerala, linking it to legendary figures and dynasties. While the historical accuracy of its content is debated, it offers glimpses into the genealogies of ruling families and societal structure. *Rajavali*, a collection of historical narratives chronicles the reigns of various kings in Kerala. It provides details about political events, alliances, wars, and administrative systems. The work offers valuable insights into the political landscape and power dynamics of the time.

- ◆ *Narayaneeyam* - devotional fervor, religious
- ◆ *Literary works*- social protocols

Literary works from this period shed light on various aspects of socio-cultural life. Works like the *Narayaneeyam* by Melpathur Narayana Bhattathiri showcase the devotional fervor, rituals, and religious beliefs prevalent during the period. Literary works often provide glimpses into social customs, such as marriage rituals, caste interactions, and community practices. Examples include the *Unnineeli Sandesham* and *Manjulalitha* by Kunjan Pillai, which offer insights into courtly etiquette and social protocols.

### 2.1.1.3 Archaeological Evidence

- ◆ *Archaeological evidence*

Archaeological excavations and findings help in reconstructing aspects of Early Medieval Society. Artefacts, pottery, coins, and structures unearthed from sites like Pattanam and Thrikkaipetta provide insights into trade networks, crafts, settlement patterns, and material culture. Archaeological evidence plays a crucial role in reconstructing the multifaceted aspects of Early Medieval Society in Kerala. Through excavations and findings, artefacts, pottery, coins, and structures are unearthed, offering valuable insights into trade networks, crafts, settlement patterns, and material culture of the era.

The excavations at Pattanam, located in present-day

- ◆ *Pattanam*
- ◆ *Thrikkaiipetta*

Kerala, have provided remarkable archaeological evidence pertaining to Early Medieval Kerala. The site offers insights into the maritime trade connections, cultural interactions, and the cosmopolitan nature of the region. Discoveries of Roman and West Asian artefacts, including amphorae, beads, and pottery, highlight the extensive trade networks and cultural exchanges. The excavations at Thrikkaiipetta have unearthed a wealth of archaeological evidence shedding light on Early Medieval settlements. The discovery of structural remains, pottery, and artefacts provides insights into the local crafts, settlement patterns, and everyday life of the people during that period.

#### 2.1.1.4 Numismatics

- ◆ *Information-  
provided by  
numismatics*

Coins minted during the Early Medieval period provide valuable information about rulers, dynasties, trade relations, and economic systems. The study of numismatics helps trace the circulation of currency, monetary policies, and economic transactions of the time. Numismatics, the study of coins, serves as a significant source of information for understanding the monetary systems, rulers, trade relations, and economic dynamics of early medieval Kerala. Coins minted during this period provide valuable information about the circulation of currency, economic transactions, and the political landscape. Coins minted during the Early Medieval period often feature inscriptions or symbols that identify the ruling dynasty or the specific ruler. *Dinara*, *Kasu* and *Pazham kasu* are referred to as gold coins in the inscription of the medieval period.

#### 2.1.1.5 Religious and Temple Records

- ◆ *Social roles,  
privileges,  
interactions-various  
castes*

Religious texts, temple records, and manuscripts offer reference to the religious practices, rituals, and social roles of different communities in early medieval Kerala. These records often contain information about land grants, patronage, festivals, and the interaction between religious institutions and society. *Mathilakam* records were legal documents issued by rulers to sanction land grants to temples. These records served as official proof of ownership and ensured the protection of temple properties. They contain information about the boundaries, tax exemptions, and rights associated with the granted lands. They provide insights into the social roles, privileges, and interactions of various caste groups within the temple ecosystem.

The reconstruction of early medieval society in Kerala



- ◆ *Comprehensive picture of medieval Kerala offered by various sources*

relies on a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates various sources. Inscriptions, literary works, travel accounts, archaeological evidence, numismatics, religious records, and anthropological studies collectively help us understand the social, cultural, economic, and religious aspects of this period. By analyzing and interpreting these sources, historians can paint a comprehensive picture of Early Medieval Society and its significance in the larger historical narrative of Kerala.

### 2.1.2 Historiographic Critique

- ◆ *Medieval historiography*

Historiography, the study of historical writing and interpretation, plays a crucial role in understanding the early medieval period in Kerala. This period, spanning from the 8th to the 14th century CE has been subject to historiographic critique due to limited available sources, biases, and the need for a comprehensive assessment of historical works. Let us have a look at the historiography of the early medieval period highlighting the evaluation of historical works in Kerala, which began in the 19th century, but serious efforts to consolidate and assess these works have been limited. Historiographic criticism examines the condition of medieval historiography, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses. Several historians have made significant contributions to the study of medieval Kerala. Their works have provided valuable insights into the social, cultural, and political dynamics of the early medieval period.

#### 2.1.2.1 Elamkulam P.N Kunjan Pillai (1904-1913)

- ◆ *Socio cultural conditions of Kerala's past*

Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai, a renowned figure in Kerala's historiography, made significant contributions to the understanding of the region's history. His dedicated efforts aimed to illuminate the obscure corners of Kerala's past, which were often clouded in mystery and confusion. His contributions emphasized the indispensability of historical knowledge for the proper study of literature and the comprehension of social and cultural conditions across different periods and regions. His profound understanding of Malayalam language and literature allowed him to uncover the interplay between language and societal dynamics. By exploring the linkages between Malayalam, Sanskrit, and Tamil, he highlighted the cultural exchanges and influences that shaped Kerala's social fabric. His meticulous analysis shed light on the socio-cultural conditions of different periods, enriching our understanding of Kerala's history.

◆ *Social practices*

Elamkulam examined topics such as the Devadasi system, *Marumakkathayam* (matrilineal system), and the Janmi system in Kerala. His research shed light on the intricate social structures and dynamics prevalent in Kerala society. By exploring the *Brahmin* population and its impact on the region, he contributed to a deeper understanding of the social fabric of Kerala. Furthermore, he made significant contributions to the study of religious practices, including temple arts and festivals, highlighting their cultural significance.

◆ *Hundred Years War*

Elamkulam's research extended to the dynastic history of Kerala. He focused on various ruling dynasties, including the Ay Dynasty, the first Chera Empire, and the second Chera Empire. His detailed analysis of historical records and inscriptions provided valuable insights into the political and social dynamics of these dynasties. Additionally, his exploration of the Hundred Years War between the Cholas and the Cheras offered a comprehensive understanding of the historical conflicts that shaped Kerala's history.

**'Some Problems in Kerala History' (3 volumes):**

◆ *Origin of caste system, impact of foreign invasion*

This extensive work by Kunjan Pillai addresses several historical issues and challenges in understanding Kerala's history. Through meticulous research and analysis, he tackles complex topics, such as the origins of the caste system, the impact of foreign invasions, and the social and cultural transformations over time.

**'In the Background of History':**

◆ *Different communities, traditions, and religious practices*

Focused on the interplay between history and culture, this work by Kunjan Pillai explores how historical events have influenced the cultural development of Kerala. He examines the contributions of different communities, traditions, and religious practices to the region's cultural landscape. This work helps uncover the underlying historical factors that have shaped Kerala's rich cultural heritage.

**'Landmarks of Culture':**

◆ *Cultural history*

Elamkulam highlights the influence of art, architecture, literature, and religious practices in shaping the cultural identity of the region. By exploring key cultural developments, he offers a deeper understanding of Kerala's cultural heritage and its historical significance.



### **‘Kerala Chrithrathinte Iruladanja Edukal’:**

- ◆ *Overlooked events and personalities*

This work unearths the lesser-known aspects of Kerala’s history, focusing on the obscure and often overlooked events and personalities that have shaped the region’s past. Kunjan Pillai’s meticulous research and narrative skill bring to light hidden stories and provide a fresh perspective on the historical narrative of Kerala.

### **‘Annathe Keralam’:**

- ◆ *Socio-Political condition*

In this work, Elamkulam examines the socio-political landscape of Kerala during the medieval period. He explores the power dynamics, governance structures, and societal institutions that shaped Kerala’s history.

### **‘Janmi System in Kerala’:**

- ◆ *Analysis of the feudal land tenure system*

Elamkulam’s study on the Janmi system in Kerala offers an in-depth analysis of the feudal land tenure system prevalent in the region. He examines the socio-economic implications of this system, its impact on agrarian society, and its role in shaping Kerala’s social structure. This work contributes to a comprehensive understanding of Kerala’s historical land relations.

### **2.1.2.2 Rajan Gurukkal**

- ◆ *Methodological clarity*
- ◆ *Epistemological foundations of historical analysis*

In line with the approach of Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, Rajan Gurukkal further developed methodological clarity in his historical research. He emphasized the importance of strengthening the chronological foundations of historical analysis. Employing a hypothetico-deductive approach to sources, he focused on transparently presenting the source basis of his inferences. Gurukkal argued that objectivity in historiography extends beyond mere transparency and involves the logical construction of theories and proofs, often relying on empirical evidence. He emphasized that these proofs are not readily available for anyone to discover, but rather require theoretical knowledge to interpret and make sense of. He highlighted the significance of understanding the epistemological foundations of historical analysis and the role of theoretical knowledge in interpreting empirical evidence. Some of his major works include *Cultural history of Kerala*, *Kerala Charitram* (2 volumes), and *History of Kerala : Prehistory to the Present*.

### 2.1.2.3 M.G.S. Narayanan

- ◆ Chronological foundations of social history of Kerala

Muttayil Govinda Menon Sankara Narayanan, popularly known as M.G.S. Narayanan, is a distinguished historian, academic, and political commentator. One of Narayanan's key contributions lies in strengthening the chronological foundations of social history in Kerala. Narayanan was a pioneer in demonstrating the significance of socio-economic factors as the primary determinants of political power in the historiography of Kerala. He drew inspiration from the seminary state model and the concept of the "peasant-Brahmin alliance" proposed by Burton Stein.

- ◆ Introducing new evidences and reinterpretations

M.G.S meticulously studied archival materials, inscriptions, and literary sources to uncover new insights and interpretations. His approach to historiography was characterized by a blend of empirical analysis and theoretical frameworks, enabling him to construct a more nuanced understanding of Kerala's past. Through his works, he strengthened the chronological foundations by introducing new evidence and reinterpretations. By highlighting the role of socio-economic structures in shaping political power, Narayanan's research challenged conventional narratives and offered a more comprehensive perspective on Kerala's history. His important works are *Perumals of Kerala*, *Cultural Symbois in Kerala*, and *Calicut: The City of Truth Revisited*.

### 2.1.2.4 M. R. Raghava Varier

- ◆ Cultural, economic, and social dynamics
- ◆ Historical materialism
- ◆ Anthropological and sociological theories

M.R. Raghava Varier, an eminent Indian epigraphist and historian, has made significant contributions to the field of historical research on Kerala's past, enriching our understanding of its cultural, economic, and social dynamics. Varier's approach to history is grounded in theoretical frameworks that guide his research and interpretations. He emphasises the importance of theory in understanding historical fragments and constructing meaningful narratives. By employing the principles of historical materialism, as expounded by Karl Marx, Varier highlights the influence of material conditions and socio-economic factors in shaping historical processes. Additionally, he draws upon anthropological and sociological theories to analyse the complexities of historical events and social dynamics. M.R. Raghava Varier's scholarly contributions have significantly enriched the historiography of Kerala. His meticulous research, methodological rigor, and theoretical insights have expanded our understanding of the region's past. Varier's



work continues to inspire new generations of historians and researchers, stimulating further exploration and analysis of Kerala's history. Some of his major works include *History of Kerala: Prehistoric to the Present*, *A Brief History of Ayurveda* and *Cultural History of Kerala*.

### 2.1.3 Emergence of *Nadu*

The emergence of *Nadu*, or regions, played a pivotal role in shaping the historical landscape of Kerala. These regions, characterized by distinct geographical boundaries and cultural identities, witnessed the formation of local politics, the rise of regional powers, and the evolution of unique socio-political structures. The political fragmentation in Kerala resulted in the emergence of distinct social and cultural practices within each region, shaping the social fabric and community identities. The emergence of *Nadu* in Kerala's history was influenced by geographical factors, political fragmentation, and the decline of centralized powers. The diverse geographical features of Kerala, including the Western Ghats, rivers, and coastlines, played a significant role in defining regional boundaries and shaping socio-economic activities. The decline of major kingdoms and the rise of regional authorities led to the establishment of smaller polities and the diversification of political power. Understanding the emergence of *Nadu* provides valuable insights into the historical context, governance structures, and societal dynamics of Early Medieval Kerala.

- ◆ Significance of the emergence of *Nadu*
- ◆ Decline of centralized power

Kerala's history is marked by the decline of major centralized powers, such as the Chera, Pandya, and Chola kingdoms, during different historical periods. This decline created a power vacuum and led to political fragmentation. With the weakening of the Chera kingdom in the 12th century, smaller regional powers and chieftains emerged, asserting their authority over specific territories and laying the foundation for the formation of *Nadus*.

- ◆ Political fragmentation

#### 2.1.3.1 Formation and Administration of *Nadu*

The fragmentation of political power resulted in the rise of regional authorities who established their own smaller polities within Kerala. These regional authorities aimed to consolidate their influence and assert control over their respective territories. The Zamorins of Calicut, also known as the Samuthiri, rose to prominence as regional rulers in the Malabar region. They established their authority through

- ◆ Rise of regional authorities

strategic alliances, trade dominance, and military powers. The Zamorins of Calicut had a well-organized administrative system with various officials and departments. The administration focused on trade regulation, maritime activities, and maintaining diplomatic relations with foreign powers.

◆ *Administrative system*

As centralized powers waned, smaller polities emerged, each with its own ruling elite and administrative systems. These polities encompassed specific geographical areas and often operated independently, competing for resources and asserting their sovereignty. The Venad kingdom, Centreed in present-day southern Kerala, emerged as a powerful polity under the rule of the Venad Kings, who expanded their influence through military conquests and alliances with neighboring chieftains.

### Administrative Centres

◆ *Nadapura-administrative Centre*

Each *Nadu* had its administrative centre, often referred to as *Nadapura* or capital. These Centres served as political, cultural, and economic hubs, attracting artisans, traders, scholars, and administrative officials. Capital cities served as centers of art, literature, and governance, reflecting the regional power and influence.

◆ *Naduvazhis- local chieftains*  
◆ *Own administrative structures*

Regional rulers, known as *Naduvazhis* or local chieftains, exercised authority over their respective *Nadu*. They established their own administrative structures, which included local councils, judicial systems, and revenue collection mechanisms. Local customs and traditions played a crucial role in shaping governance practices. This shift allowed for greater autonomy and local decision-making, tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of each *Nadu*. *Naduvazhis* were influential figures who held political and administrative power within their territories. They were responsible for maintaining law and order, resolving disputes, and ensuring the well-being of the local population. The authority of *Naduvazhis* was often hereditary, with leadership passing down through generations. The Valluvanad, situated in present-day Palakkad district, was ruled by the Valluvakonathiri, who held the title of *Samuthiri*.

Each *Nadu* had its own local assembly or council, known as the *Nadu Kovilakam* or *Nadu Sabha*. These assemblies comprised representatives from noble families, local chiefs, and prominent individuals. The Cochin *Nadu Sabha* played a



- ◆ *Nadu Kovilakam/ Nadu Sabha- local assembly or council*

significant role in the administration and governance of the Cochin kingdom. It acted as a forum for political discussions, resolving disputes, and addressing socio-economic issues within the region. The rulers of Cochin appointed ministers known as *Deshavazhis* to assist in the governance of their territories. These ministers were responsible for overseeing revenue administration, trade regulation, and the overall welfare of the region. Palakkad held regular assemblies where representatives from different sections of society participated.

- ◆ *Governed civil and criminal matters*

Each *Nadu* had its own legal system that governed civil and criminal matters within the region. Local courts, presided over by the *Naduvazhis* or their appointed officials, heard cases, adjudicated disputes, and ensured justice was upheld. Kottayam had an organized legal system with courts known as *Perumkaliyattam*, which had the authority to settle civil and criminal disputes. The decisions made by these courts were based on customary laws, regional customs, and precedents established over time.

- ◆ *Rulers granted lands to temples, Brahmins*

The rulers of *Nadu* granted lands to temples, *Brahmins*, and other deserving individuals as a means of religious patronage and socio-economic stability. The revenue generated from these lands formed a crucial part of the regional economy. The land grants made by the rulers of Venad, such as the “Terisappalli Plates” issued by King Sthanu Ravi Varma, provided insights into the land tenure system and the socio-economic structure of the period.

- ◆ *Generate revenue for infrastructure development*

Local governance systems in *Nadu* involve revenue collection to sustain the administrative machinery and provide for the needs of the region. Land taxes, tolls, and other levies were imposed to generate revenue for infrastructure development, public works, and the maintenance of law and order. The rulers of Travancore implemented an efficient revenue collection system known as *Kuruthi*, which involved assessing taxes based on land fertility, agricultural production, and other economic factors. This system ensured a fair and equitable distribution of tax burden among the population.

Rivalries between different *Nadus*, territorial disputes, and power struggles shaped the political landscape of Kerala, influencing alliances and diplomatic negotiations. As various *Nadus* vied for power and control, conflicts

- ◆ *Conflicts and alliances among the Nadu*

and rivalries emerged. These conflicts often stemmed from territorial disputes, claims to resources, or ambitions for political supremacy. Rulers of different *Nadus* engaged in battles and strategic alliances to gain dominance over neighboring regions. The rivalry between the Venad and the Cochin is a notable example of inter-regional conflicts. The rulers of these *Nadus*, known as the Venad Swaroopam and the Kochi Rajas, competed for control over trade routes and strategic coastal areas, leading to military confrontations and shifting alliances.

#### 2.1.4 Land Grants and Alienation of Rights

- ◆ *The practice of bestowing land rights by rulers*

Land grants in Early Medieval Kerala refer to the practice of bestowing land rights by rulers or authorities to individuals, communities, or institutions. A land grant was a formal act by which the ruler or governing authority transferred the rights and privileges associated with a particular piece of land to a recipient. These rights could include ownership, cultivation, taxation, and other benefits derived from the land. Copper plates or stone inscriptions recorded the details of the land grant. The purpose of land grants in Early Medieval Kerala was multifaceted, reflecting the complex social, economic, and religious dynamics of the region.

- ◆ *Land grants to temples*

Land grants were frequently made to support and sustain religious institutions, such as temples and monasteries. The grants aimed to provide resources for the maintenance of these establishments, including the sustenance of priests, performance of rituals, and upkeep of the premises. By bestowing land, rulers demonstrated their patronage of religion and sought to garner religious favor and support from the community. A ruler might grant a piece of land to a temple, ensuring a regular source of income from agricultural produce and donations. The temple could use the granted land for cultivation, generate revenue, and fund religious activities.

- ◆ *Land grants as reward for service*

Land grants were used as a means of rewarding individuals or communities for their loyalty, military service, or contributions to the state. Rulers bestowed land as a gesture of appreciation and recognition for the support received. A warrior who displayed exceptional valor in battle might be granted land as a reward for their bravery. This land grant not only honored their service but also provided them with a source of income and social status.

Land grants were sometimes utilized to establish or



- ◆ *Used to establish political alliance*

strengthen political alliances with regional chiefs or influential local figures. By granting land to these individuals, rulers could secure their loyalty and support, thereby enhancing their own political authority. A ruler might grant land to a local chieftain who had demonstrated loyalty and influence in a particular region. This act aimed to forge a mutually beneficial alliance, with the chieftain offering military support and regional stability in return.

- ◆ *Upliftment of marginal groups*

Land grants were also made to support specific communities or welfare causes. These grants aimed to provide resources for the sustenance and upliftment of marginalized groups, artisans, or other economically disadvantaged sections of society. A ruler might grant land to a community of fishermen, providing them with access to fishing grounds or coastal areas for their livelihood. This land grant not only supported the community but also reinforced their social standing within the region.

- ◆ *Various dimensions of the time*

The practice of land grants in Early Medieval Kerala reflected the rulers' authority, political strategies, religious beliefs, and social obligations. By analyzing the motivations behind land grants and their varied purposes, historians gain a deeper understanding of the socio-economic, political, and cultural dimensions of the time.

- ◆ *Devadana land-temple*
- ◆ *Subinfeudation*

The recipients of land grants varied, depending on the Nature of the grant and the intentions of the granting authority. *Brahmins*, for example, were often recipients of *agraharas*, which were land grants given to maintain religious and educational institutions. Temples and deities also received land grants known as *devadana* for their sustenance and maintenance. Non-*Brahmin* communities, artisans, and other groups could receive land grants called *viruthi* for their livelihood and social standing. The practice of land grants involved transferring the rights to cultivate, use, and benefit from the granted land. In some cases, the recipients became the direct owners of the land, while in others, they held specific rights and privileges over the land without full ownership. This led to a complex system of land tenure and subinfeudation, wherein the granted land could be further leased, subleased, or transferred to other parties, resulting in a fragmented land ownership structure.

The documentation and recording of land grants were crucial for ensuring the legitimacy and protection of the

◆ Documentation of land grants

rights associated with the granted land. Copper plates, stone inscriptions, temple records, and other forms of written documentation were used to record and preserve the details of land grants. These records served as legal and historical evidence, providing insights into the Nature of land grants, the terms and conditions associated with them, and the parties involved.

◆ Socio-economic implications

The practice of land grants had profound socio-economic implications. They contributed to the distribution of wealth and resources within society, shaped social hierarchies, and influenced land ownership patterns. Land grants also played a role in promoting agricultural activities, fostering economic growth, and providing livelihood opportunities to the recipients. However, the alienation of land rights through subinfeudation could lead to disputes, conflicts, and changes in the socio-economic dynamics of local communities.

◆ Pulayas, Idayas, Villavas owned land  
◆ After 9th century-ownership passed to the Brahmins

The *Brahmins* portrayed themselves as the lords of Kerala, claiming that Parasurama had bestowed all the land on them. They propagated the idea that the generosity of these *Brahmin* lords and masters provided sustenance, clothing, and shelter for all the people of Kerala. However, these claims were aimed at concealing historical facts and consolidating their own power. Before the 9th century CE. the land was primarily owned by the *Pulayas, Idayas, Villavas*, and agriculturalists. However, from the 9th to the 13th century CE. ownership passed to the present class of landholders. The domination of the *Nambuthiri Brahmins* over village and local-level administration became explicit. *Brahmin* families like Pannigur, Chokiram, Trikkavara, and Tiruvalla wielded significant power and influence, supported by the *Nairs* who originally served as tenants but later developed into a military and administrative class.

◆ Thara- village unit

The earlier *Nuttuvar* were transformed into the army of the *Naduvazhis*, with the right to mint coins entrusted to the *Naduvazhis* themselves. Separate officials were appointed to collect tariffs from foreign traders and peasants. The village, known as *Thara*, served as the lowest administrative unit for all administrative purposes. The *Naduvazhi* was assisted by *Nattukuttam* in carrying out administration of the *Nadus*.

Temples were established extensively throughout Kerala, serving as Centres for education, healthcare, and accommodation for *Brahmins*. The temples were endowed



◆ Management of temple property

with vast properties to meet their routine expenses. The management of temple property was entrusted to *uralars*. These trustees were responsible for conducting poojas and ceremonies, managing educational institutions, and overseeing various grades of temple servants, including Devadasis. Temples owned thousands of acres of land.

◆ 12th century- Nambuthiris- monopolise of wealth, power, and education

The temple trustees were effectively controlled by the *Nattukuttams*, local chieftains, and the *Koiladhikarikal*. Regulations were put in place to prevent the misappropriation of temple properties by the trustees. Punishments like ostracism were prescribed to protect the rights of cultivating tenants. The *Koiladhikarikal* held supreme power over all temple-related matters. During the 6th and 10th centuries CE, temples accumulated vast landed properties through gifts and endowments. The trustees received land as remuneration for their services, and male and female slaves were given to them for assistance. Over time, as the landed estates grew, the power of the trustees became uncontrollable. From the 12th century CE onwards, the *Nambuthiris*, as the monopolise of wealth, power, and education, became more powerful than the ruling class. The trustees, who had the power of capital punishment, sought to establish an authority parallel to the royal authority, with the king having no power to punish the *Nambuthiri Brahmins*. This period is known as the *Nambuthiri Age* in Kerala history.

◆ Introduced- untouchability, unapproachability, unseeability

The *Brahmins* gained control over the economic system, consolidating the entire wealth of the land in their hands. The poorer sections of society suffered greatly during this age due to the imposition of new taxes such as customs duties, death duties, market tax, head tax, and slave tax. Social evils such as untouchability, unapproachability, and unseeability were introduced. *Pulayas*, for instance, were prohibited from approaching a *Nambuthiri* within 96 feet. At the same time, social eminence was given to the *Nairs*, a Sudra class, by assigning them military services as their monopoly. They were forced to believe in strict social norms, such as Nair men immediately killing a *Tiyya* (person of lower caste) who came within 36 feet of a *Nambuthiri*. Practices like *Talikettukalyanam*, *Sambandham*, *Nair Polyandry*, *Devadasi* system, and *Marumakkathayam* (matrilineal system) were products of the feudal system introduced by the *Brahmins*.

In terms of judicial activities, caste differences and social status were taken into consideration, especially in punishment cases. The absence of written documents regarding law and

- ◆ Ordeals known as *Satyapareekeshakal*

justice makes it difficult to provide detailed information. Justice during medieval Kerala was often determined through ordeals known as *Satyapareekeshakal*. These ordeals included water ordeals, fire ordeals, poison ordeals, and hanging ordeals. The fire ordeal was the most common among them.

#### 2.1.4.1 Types of Land Grants

- ◆ Land grants to Brahmins-religious and educational

**Agrahara:** *Agrahara* were land grants given to *Brahmins* for the purpose of maintaining religious and educational institutions. These grants were intended to support the *Brahmin* community and their scholarly activities. The *Brahmins* residing in *agrarahas* played a crucial role in preserving and disseminating knowledge, performing religious rituals, and imparting education to the community.

- ◆ Land grants to temples and deities

**Devadana:** *Devadana* refers to land grants given to temples or deities for their sustenance and maintenance. These grants were aimed at providing resources for the upkeep of temple premises, conducting regular rituals, and supporting the temple administration. The income generated from the lands granted to temples would be utilized for various temple-related expenses and charitable activities.

- ◆ Land grants to Brahmins for their livelihood

**Brahmadeya:** *Brahmadeya* were land grants specifically allocated to *Brahmins* for their livelihood and social status. These grants were given as a mark of respect and recognition for their learned status and religious contributions. The land provided to *Brahmins* served as a means of income and sustenance, ensuring their economic stability and social standing within the community.

- ◆ Land grants to artisans

**Viruthi:** *Viruthi* refers to land grants given to non-*Brahmin* communities or artisans for their livelihood. These grants were aimed at supporting various non-*Brahmin* occupational groups such as farmers, artisans, and craftsmen. The land provided to them enabled them to engage in their respective professions, ensuring their economic well-being and social stability.

- ◆ Significant role in social hierarchy

It is important to note that the distribution of land grants varied in different periods of Kerala's history and was influenced by various social, economic, and political factors. The granting of land played a significant role in the power dynamics and social structure of early Kerala, shaping the relationship between different communities and institutions.



#### 2.1.4.2 Alienation of Rights

##### ◆ Consolidating the Brahmin community

The records clearly indicate that the corporate Nature and communal unity of the *Brahmins* played a significant role in their economic supremacy in contemporary society. By surrendering proprietary rights to certain lands in their possession, *Brahmin* landowners intensified their membership in the corporation, subsequently granting them tenancy rights over extensive areas under the control of the temple. The donations made by the *Brahmins* to the temples served as a means to further their general interests, and the transfer of ownership of some of their personal possessions to the corporation strengthened communal unity through material connections. This exemplifies the process of consolidating the *Brahmin* community, shifting from a position of inter-village conflicts to integrated corporations under the supervision of Talis. The changes in the nature and authority of land rights during this time are evident from their caste tradition, which justifies the alterations through the tale of Parasurama's land gift to their ancestors.

##### ◆ Various forms of land right

The land endowed to the temple encompassed crown lands, lands owned by the ruling class, as well as lands held by individual *Brahmin* and non-*Brahmin* landowners. Even individuals who possessed intermediary or tenancy rights alone chose to transfer their rights to the temple and assume a subordinate position. The various forms of land rights, including complete ownership (*Kanam*), intermediary-ship (*Itayitu*), tenancy rights (*Karanmai*), and occupancy (*Kutumai*), which were acquired by the temple through diverse grants, were subsequently redistributed as follows: proprietary rights shifted from non-*Brahmin* landowners to the Brahman corporation; intermediary rights were transferred from non-*Brahmin* intermediaries to *Brahmin* intermediaries; tenancy rights transitioned from royal and private tenants to temple tenants, while occupancy rights were transferred from settlers of royal and private lands to settlers affiliated with the temple.

##### ◆ Nature of land rights

While examining the grants that involved the alienation of tenancy and occupancy rights, it is crucial to gain a clear understanding of the nature of land rights held by both the King and ordinary settlers. M.G.S. Narayanan suggests that, theoretically, all land belonged to the king. However, contemporary records or the law books provide no references that shed light on the king's rights over land. Considering the broader situation in South India during that time, it is

difficult to ascertain with certainty that the king held ultimate authority over agricultural lands. While he served as the final authority of the kingdom, his control over forest lands, fallow lands, or unoccupied lands was implicitly assumed. The king also possessed personal property (*Cerikkal*), in addition to the vast wealth of the royal family.

◆ *Rights of tenants*

During the early years of this period, agricultural communities retained the land they cultivated and paid taxes for the protection provided by the King. One cannot easily disregard their rights to the soil, which had been enjoyed since the days of their ancestors' slash-and-burn farming practices. When certain villages were granted to the temple by the King, there were numerous witnesses, likely individual proprietors of the respective areas, attesting to the grant. It appears that these grants did not deprive the settlers of their occupancy rights, although the individual proprietors of the village were compelled to accept the temple's overlordship. In the case of tenants and settlers, the transfer of lordship and proprietorship to the temple occurred, but eviction did not seem to take place. However, the records do not mention the deprivation of tenant's rights (*Kutinikkikkaranmai*) or the continuation of tenants' rights over the land even after the grant (*Kudininga Karanmai Miyatci*), as can be seen in certain Chola records. It is also unclear whether the agricultural settlers enjoyed subordinate agricultural rights (*Kilkaranmai Udaya Kudigal*) on the granted land. Various group of people enjoyed various shades of rights on the same piece of land i.e., the multiplexity of rights.



## Summarised Overview

There are different sources for reconstructing the history of the medieval Kerala. Literature provides information on Kerala's medieval socio-cultural processes. Archaeological materials are crucial for recreating the society's varied facets. The excavations at Pattanam and Thrikkaietta shed light on local trades, habitation patterns, and daily life at the time. In addition to religious history, temple records include important details on socio-cultural life. The study of medieval Kerala gained greatly from the efforts of several historians. Their writings have contributed significantly to our understanding of the early mediaeval period's social, cultural, and political processes. Elamkulam, M.G.S., Rajan Gurukkal, Raghava Varrier and so on made valuable contributions to medieval historiography.

With the emergence of *Nadus*, regional authorities rose to prominence and established their own, smaller polities within Kerala as a result of the fragmentation of political power. The goal of these regional authorities was to increase their power and assert their control of their respective regions. *Naduvazhis*, or local chieftains, were regional rulers who were in charge of their respective *Nadu*. They set up their own administrative structures, like local councils, judicial systems, and ways to get money from people.

The practice of land grants in Early Medieval Kerala reflected the rulers' authority, political strategies, religious beliefs, and social obligations. They were a form of judicial and administrative procedure wherein rulers or authorities granted land rights to certain people, or organisations. In addition to serving as a tool for redistribution of land, land grants had important social, economic, and religious implications. The land endowments served a variety of functions, including advancing religious institutions, rewarding loyal subjects, fortifying political relations, and the welfare of the specific communities. Since they showed the ruler's dominance and favour over the area, land gifts were frequently seen as a sign of authority and patronage. It seems that large tracts of property were transferred from the kings and non-*Brahmin* landowners to corporations of the Brahman caste, while on the other side, individual Brahman rights were ceded in exchange for greater corporate authority through offerings to the temple. The Brahmans, who owned the land, presided over the society as its rulers. They were followed by allied groups of tenants, tillers, artisans, and craftsmen. In short, the old landowners like the Pulayas, Idayas, and Villavas were stripped of their ownership rights, which is one of the dismissal events of history.

## Self Assessment

1. What do you know about Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai?
2. Name the important works of M.G.S.Narayanan.
3. Who is the author of the work *A Brief History of Ayurveda*?
4. What do you mean by *Nadapura*?
5. Explain the concept of sub infeudation.
6. Who is *Koiladhikarikal*?
7. Name different types of land grants.
8. Mention the importance of the excavation at Pattanam.
9. Bring out the significance of inscriptions in studying medieval Kerala.
10. How is the author of *Narayaneeyam*?

## Assignments

1. Examine the concept of alienation of rights in early medieval Kerala.
2. Analyse the contributions of M.G.S Narayan and Elamkulam on medieval Kerala history.
3. Discuss the emergence of *Nadus*.
4. Bring out social implications of land grants.
5. Briefly analyse the sources for the study of medieval Kerala.

## Suggested Readings

1. A . Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, DC Books, Kottayam. 2022.
2. Kesavan Veluthat and P P Sudhakaran (ed.), *Advances in History*, Calicut, 2003.
3. M. G .S Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, Current Books, Thrissur, 2018.
4. M. G. S Narayanan, *Foundations of South Indian Society and culture*, New Delhi, 1994.
5. M .G .S Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat, '*Bhakti Movement in South India*', in S C Malik (ed.), *Dissent Protest and Reform in Indian Civilization*, Shimla, 1980.



6. M .G. S Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, Kerala Historical Society, 1972.
7. Sebastian Joseph (ed.), *On Presenting History*, DC Books, Kottayam, 2017.

## References

1. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai(ed.), *Elamkulam Kunjanpillayute Therenjedutha krithikal*, International Centre for Kerala Studies, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 2005.
2. K N Ganesh, *Reflections on Pre-Modern Kerala*, Cosmo Books, Thrissur, 2016.
3. K.N. Ganesh, *Keralathinte Innalakal*, State Institute of Languages, Thiruvananthapuram, 2011.
4. K N Ganesh, *Malayaliyude Desakalangal*, Raspberry, Calicut, 2016.
5. Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahmin Settlements in Kerala*, Thrissur, 2013.
6. Kesavan Veluthat, *The Early Medieval in South India*, New Delhi, 2008.
7. Puthussery Ramachandran, *Kerala Charithrathinte Adisthana Rekhal*, State Institute of Languages, Thiruvananthapuram, 2007.



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# Temple Centric Social Engineering

## Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner would be able to:

- ♦ analyze the impact of *Brahmin* settlements on the socio-cultural fabric of medieval Kerala society.
- ♦ examine the process of Sanskritization and its role in shaping the religious and cultural practices of medieval Kerala.
- ♦ evaluate the role of temples as economic and social institutions in medieval Kerala, considering their influence on trade, education, and community welfare.

## Background

Exploring this era in Kerala's history reveals profound transformations in the establishment and functioning of temples, leaving an indelible mark on the social, economic, and cultural fabric of the region. Medieval Kerala witnessed to a myriad of political entities vying for control, with the Cheras, Pandyas, Cholas, and Zamorins. Against this backdrop of shifting powers and political landscapes, temples emerged as focal points, harnessing their spiritual influence to shape the socio-political narrative.

*Brahmin* settlements emerged as vibrant epicenters of religious and intellectual activity. Nestled in the vicinity of temples, these settlements became the embodiment of religious authority and custodians of cultural traditions. Here, scholars studied ancient texts, performed rituals, and guided the local community.

In this period, Sanskritization played a pivotal role in temple-centric social engineering during this era. It became a vehicle through which lower castes and communities sought to ascend the social ladder by adopting Brahminical rituals, customs, and practices. This process resulted in the dissemination of Brahminical culture, encompassing language, rituals, and social norms. Temples transcended their religious roles, emerging as economic and social institutions



of paramount importance. They stood at the center of economic activities and trade, serving as beacons of prosperity. Donations and offerings poured into the temple coffers, creating a substantial source of wealth that fueled local economies. Moreover, temples became pillars of community welfare, extending their reach beyond spiritual matters. They offered education, healthcare, and support to the marginalized, embodying the principles of compassion and social responsibility.

## Keywords

Sanskritization, *Keralolpathi*, *Brahmin* settlement, Temple

## Discussion

### 2.2.1 *Brahmin* Settlements

Rajan Gurukkal provided an analytical interpretation regarding the *Brahmin* settlements. Contrary to other parts of south India, Kerala lacks a *brahmadeya* charter for its *Brahmins*. According to *Keralolpathi*, the traditional chronicle of the *Brahmins*, their presence in Kerala can be traced back to the Parasurama legend. This legend recounts the reclamation of Kerala's land from the sea, specifically for the settlement of *Brahmins*. It signifies that the *Brahmins* owed their settlements to Paraśurama himself, disregarding the involvement of kings who invited and settled *Brahmins* throughout south India. Thus, the *Brahmins* migrated to Kerala independently, without the patronage of local kings. According to tradition, these early *Brahmins* hailed from Ahichhatra, likely from *Aryavarta* in the Gangetic region. There is a strong belief that their migration to Kerala occurred through Tamil Nadu. The renowned thirteen brahmanical temples in Kerala were originally part of Tamil Nadu's 108 *divyadésams* and played a vital role in the Tamil bhakti movement, which encompassed both temple worship and *Brahmin* activities. In summary, it is reasonable to assume that the *Brahmins* primarily migrated to Kerala from neighboring regions of Tamil Nadu.

- ◆ *Keralolpathi* legend
- ◆ Different views regarding the settlements of *Brahmins*



Some historians propose that the migration of *Brahmins*



◆ Migration of Brahmins

to Kerala originated from Karnataka, linking Ahichchatra to Aihole and suggesting a migration route through the Tulu region. They notice similar characteristics between the *Brahmins* of Karnataka and Kerala. Additionally, the presence of certain archaic Kannada expressions in the inscriptions (old Malayalam) supports this theory. According to an early *Keralolpathi* tradition, during the reign of Udayavarman Kolattiri, a total of 237 *Brahmin* households from Tulu villages like Vilakkar Gunavanta and Itupuncha were settled through a royal initiative. This migration possibly took place during the 12th century CE, under the rule of Madhavacharya. The migrants, known as *empratiris*, have preserved the Tulu language and culture to this day. However, the *Namboodiri Brahmins*, who claimed the highest social status, considered them to be inferior.

◆ 32 Brahmin settlements

According to Parasurama's *Keralolpathi* tradition, there were 64 *Brahmin* villages, evenly distributed between the Tulu region and Kerala. In Kerala, the identified settlements include Payyanur, Perumchellur, Alathur, Karanthol, Chokiram, Panniyur, Karikkatu, Hänamangalam, Trissivaperur, and Peruvanam, situated between the Perumpuzha and Karumanpuzha rivers. Also listed are Chamunda, Iringadikudal (trungätikkutal), Avattipputhur (Avittathur), Paravur, Aranikkalam, Muzhikkulam, Kuzhavur, Adavur, Chenganad libhyam, Uliyannur, and Kazhuthanād, located between the Churni river and Kanyakumari. Additionally, Ettumanoor, Kumaranellur, Kätmaruku, Arammula, Thiruvalla, Kidanganur, Chenganur, Kaviyür, Venmani, and Nirmannu are part of the identified settlements. Out of these, 17 settlements contain temple inscriptions from the ninth to tenth centuries CE. Four of these settlements are referenced in inscriptions from other settlements, and three are mentioned in contemporary literary works. Meanwhile, seven settlements have no mentions outside of the tradition.

*Brahmin* villages are primarily located in agro-climatic regions suitable for paddy cultivation, which was the main economic resource during that period. Paddy fields symbolized contemporary wealth, with landlords effectively controlling these valuable resources. Notably, the area between Peruncellur (Taliparamba) and Karikkad (Malappuram) failed to attract *Brahmins* due to its unsuitability for paddy farming caused by tidal salination, even in the upstream areas. Similarly, north of the Korapuzha river (Elathur river), the land strip between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea narrows, resulting in limited fertile midlands. Fertile

◆ *Distribution of Brahmin villages in-agro-climatic areas*

lands are scattered amidst the hills and the sea in northern Malabar, with vast expanses like the Etavatakkann field being exceptionally rare. The region's shorter rivers allow tidal seawater to reach upstream, rendering the low-lying fields saline and unsuitable for rice cultivation. Furthermore, survey reports indicate that the land is unsuitable for rice farming due to chemical reactions involving soil oxides. The soil's rapid water permeability makes it too hard to till during summer, and the prevalence of iron-rich red soil further diminishes its suitability. Consequently, those seeking fertile alluvial soil were not drawn to this region. Therefore, all the traditional *Brahmin* villages are situated on the fertile riverbanks of the Periyar and Perar rivers.

◆ *References related to Brahmin settlements*

*Brahmin* villages beyond the 32 settlements had their own assembly called *sabha*, according to inscriptions. A document found at Chembra near Mahe in Kerala, dated 955 CE, mentions the village assembly in Etannur. A 10th-century inscription near Taliparamba states that 24 *Brahmins* were relocated from Vaikom settlements. Unfortunately, the first part of this inscription is lost, so the founders and date of the settlement remain unknown. Similar expansion of *Brahmin* settlements occurred in southern Kerala. The Kollur matham copper plates record land grants to 23 *Brahmin* families and their settlement. The Kilimanur copper plates from 1169 CE mention the relocation of 10 *Brahmins* from eight settlements to Thiruppalkkadal temple. These sources highlight the establishment of new villages from existing ones, which are not part of the traditional list.

◆ *Keralolpathi-Brahmin brought Perumals to Kerala*

The method involved relocating *Brahmins* from their original tenth-century settlements to establish new ones. The settlements were not founded by the Perumal of Mahodayapuram, as per *Keralolpathi*, which states that *Brahmins* brought Perumals to Kerala. Earlier *Brahmins* themselves founded settlements in Kerala, possibly through self-directed and self-supported migration, potentially with some assistance from chieftains on the fringes. Notably, *Brahmins* refuse to acknowledge indebtedness to any human agency. *Keralolpathi* strongly adheres to the Parasurama legend, aiming to legitimize the history of the *Brahmin* community in Kerala.

The *Keralolpathi* legends, which played a role in legitimizing chieftains' rights and privileges, likely originated during the 12th and thirteenth centuries when the *jati-jenmi-Naduvazhi*



- ◆ Sabha -assembly of Brahmin landlord

system was solidifying. In Kerala, regardless of their status as *Brahmin* or non-*Brahmin*, villages were referred to as *ur*, unlike in Tamil Nadu where *Brahmin* villages were called *brahmadeya* and non-*Brahmin* villages were known as *ur*. *Brahmin* landlords collectively formed a governing body called *sabha*, which held authoritative control over the people and assets of their respective villages. The members of the *sabha* were referred to as *sabhaiyar* and *ur*. The *Brahmins* predominantly possessed land ownership in the villages, either as *brahmaswam* (held by *Brahmins*) or as *devaswam* (held by the temple).

- ◆ Brahmin settlement- temple-centric social engineering

*Brahmin* settlements, nestled amidst medieval Kerala's temple-focused social planning, and strategically positioned near temples, these settlements become havens of Brahminical power, preserving religious and cultural traditions.

- ◆ Sanskritization coined by M.N.Srinivas

### 2.2.2 Consolidation of Sanskritization

Sanskritization, a sociological concept coined by M.N. Srinivas, refers to the process through which lower castes and communities adopt Brahminical rituals, customs, and practices in an attempt to elevate their social status and gain acceptance within the hierarchical social structure. In medieval Kerala, Sanskritization played a crucial role in temple-centered society.

#### i) Adoption of Brahminical Rituals and Customs

- Rituals- central role in the Sanskritization process

Rituals played a central role in the Sanskritization process. Communities meticulously imitated Brahminical rituals, adapting them to their own practices and beliefs. By incorporating these rituals into their religious observances, they aimed to bridge the gap between their own caste-based traditions and the revered Brahminical customs. This assimilation of rituals contributed to a sense of continuity and cultural harmony, fostering a shared religious framework within the broader society. Moreover, the adoption of Brahminical social norms and behaviours further consolidated the process of Sanskritization. Communities sought to mirror the *Brahmins'* code of conduct, etiquette, and lifestyle, embracing principles of purity, austerity, and moral rectitude. By aligning themselves with these ideals, they endeavored to emulate the esteemed position held by the *Brahmins* in society, gradually redefining social norms and expectations.

#### ii) Incorporating Sanskrit language

- ◆ *Sanskrit words-  
religious and  
social discourse*

Sanskrit, being the language of Brahminical texts and rituals, was embraced by lower castes and communities as a means of elevating their social status. Language served as a powerful catalyst in the process of Sanskritization. Sanskrit, the ancient language of the *Brahmins* and the sacred language of Hindu scriptures, gained prominence as the vehicle of knowledge and cultural refinement. Communities eagerly embraced Sanskrit as a means of communication, learning, and religious expression. Through this linguistic transformation, they sought to align themselves with the intellectual and spiritual authority associated with the Brahmanical tradition.

### **iii) Dissemination of Brahminical Culture**

- ◆ *Wide acceptance  
of Brahminical  
tradition*

Through the process of Sanskritization, Brahminical culture, including its religious beliefs, moral codes, and social norms, spread to lower castes and communities. This dissemination led to the wide acceptance and practice of Brahminical customs and traditions throughout Kerala.

### **iv) Influence on social hierarchy**

- ◆ *Consolidation of  
existing hierarchies*
- ◆ *Consolidation  
of Religious  
Authority*

The adoption of Brahminical practices by lower castes and communities contributed to the consolidation of the existing social hierarchy. By emulating the rituals and customs associated with the upper castes, individuals sought to improve their social standing and gain recognition within the hierarchical structure.

### **v) Temple centric Social Engineering**

- ◆ *Exclusion of  
non-Brahminical  
practices*

Temples served as the focal points for Sanskritization and the dissemination of Brahminical practices. Lower castes and communities actively engaged in temple activities, gradually assuming roles in temple administration and participating in religious ceremonies. It is important to note that Sanskritization, while offering opportunities for upward mobility within the social hierarchy, also perpetuated social divisions and reinforced caste-based discrimination. The process contributed to the dominance of Brahminical culture and ideals, resulting in the marginalization and exclusion of non-Brahminical practices and beliefs. Sanskritization played a significant role in medieval Kerala by influencing the adoption of Brahminical rituals, customs, and practices by lower castes and communities. It led to the dissemination of Brahminical culture, contributed to the consolidation of social hierarchy, and had a lasting impact on religious authority and social engineering in the region.



### 2.2.3 Temple as an Economic and Social Institution

- ◆ Sanskritization-  
tool for mobility  
and social  
acceptance

As mentioned above the process of Sanskritization in the context of early Kerala history unveils a remarkable transformation where lower castes and communities sought to ascend the social ladder by embracing Brahminical rituals, customs, and practices. This phenomenon played a crucial role and defined the era, leaving an indelible mark on the social fabric of medieval Kerala. The yearning for social mobility led communities to emulate the rituals, traditions, and ways of the *Brahmins*, the highest caste in the Hindu social hierarchy. By adopting Brahminical practices, they aimed to secure a higher social status and recognition within the prevailing social order. Sanskritization became a potent tool in their quest for upward mobility and social acceptance.

- ◆ Temples-  
key agents  
-solidifying  
the process of  
Sanskritization

The consolidation of Sanskritization profoundly impacted the social hierarchy of early Kerala. As lower castes and communities assimilated Brahminical practices, a hierarchical structure based on purity and ritualistic authority solidified. The *Brahmins*, as custodians of religious knowledge and rituals, enjoyed elevated status and influence within the social order. Their religious and cultural authority was reinforced, granting them a privileged position in the power dynamics of medieval Kerala. Religious institutions, particularly temples, became key agents in propagating and solidifying the process of Sanskritization. Temples served as the epicentre for the dissemination of Brahminical culture, rituals, and practices. The presence of *Brahmins* in these temples and their role as custodians of religious affairs further reinforced the process. Temples became platforms for social emulation, providing a space for communities to actively engage in Sanskritization and further solidify the social hierarchy.

- ◆ Temples-central  
position as  
economic and  
social institutions
- ◆ Hubs for economic  
activities, trade,  
and social  
gatherings

Temples in medieval Kerala held a central position as economic and social institutions. They were not only places of worship but also served as hubs for economic activities, trade, and social gatherings. The wealth accumulated through donations and offerings at the temples played a crucial role in sustaining local economies. The temple served as an agency for easier and more efficient extraction of surplus from the peasants in the agrarian economy. This contributed to the extension of agriculture in the tribal areas and the consolidation of the landlord domination. Gradually the temple accelerated the process of the disintegration of tribal society and its reorganisation as a caste society. In the newly



formed caste society, the temple served as an integrating factor linking the high and low in its service and drawing towards itself as client the different castes and sub castes. The temple which was landed magnate from the beginning, also developed into a store house of gold and silver and precious jewels as well as the regular place of assembly for ritual elite.

◆ *Economic importance of temples*

The economic importance of temples in medieval Kerala cannot be overstated. Temples served as magnets for commerce and trade, attracting merchants, artisans, and pilgrims from far and distant places. These bustling centres of activity facilitated economic exchanges, fostering a vibrant marketplace where goods and services were bought and sold. The presence of temples created a favorable environment for economic growth, stimulating local economies and contributing to the region's prosperity. One of the primary sources of economic sustenance for temples was the wealth accumulated through donations and offerings from devotees. The devout contributed generously, bestowing land, precious metals, jewels, livestock, and other valuable assets to the temples. This influx of wealth provided a solid financial foundation, enabling temples to undertake infrastructure development, patronize the arts, and support community initiatives.

◆ *Centre of economic, social, educational and health care*

In essence, temples in medieval Kerala were not limited to their religious functions alone. They embodied a holistic approach, addressing the economic, educational, healthcare, and social needs of the community. The economic activities generated by temples bolstered local economies, while the support provided by temples in education, healthcare, and community welfare strengthened the social fabric. Understanding the pivotal role of temples as economic and social institutions in medieval Kerala history is crucial for learners to appreciate the wider implications of temple-centric social engineering. It reveals the intricate interplay between religion, economy, and society, showcasing how temples became epicentres of economic growth, educational enlightenment, healthcare provisions, and community solidarity.

► **Centre of socio-economic activities**

Finally the temple acted as the agent for developing, consolidating, transmitting and conserving the legacy of culture. Naturally, the temple represented a most revolutionary and forward looking force in south India and all those who were related to it in many complex ways accepted the religion it represented.



## Summarised Overview

There are different views regarding the origin of *Brahmin* settlements in Kerala. *Keralolpathi* tradition asserted that the *Nambuthiri Brahmins* established 64 settlements, of which 32 belonged to the Tulu region and 32 settlements in Kerala. The *Keralolpathi* legends are also part of the ideology that legitimises the rights and privileges of the chieftains. The location of brahmin villages reveals that they generally in agro-climatic regions suitable for paddy cultivation. Naturally, rice fields were the most major source of income in the modern era, and a landlord effectively ruled over the paddy fields.

Sanskritization played a significant role in temple-centered society in medieval Kerala. A sociological concept called *sanskritization* was developed by M.N. Srinivas to describe the process by which lower castes and groups acquire Brahminical rites, customs, and practises in an effort to advance their social standing and be accepted within the social hierarchy. Social hierarchy developed in the state with the formation of the *Brahmin* settlements. The *Brahmins* dominated all social institutions in Kerala owing to their temple-centered culture. In those circumstances, temples were crucial to Kerala's social structures. The *Brahmin* village and the temple were interchangeable terms. Temples grew into a centred around which production and distribution operations were conducted. The *Brahmin* colonies in Kerala were therefore mostly temple-centered. After the *Brahmin* colonies in Kerala, the constructed temples are mostly discovered.

Temples served as centres of trade and commerce, drawing traders, crafts people, and pilgrims from all over the world. These humming hubs of activity promoted trade, creating a thriving market where products and services were purchased and traded. The existence of temples facilitated economic development, boosting local economies and adding to the wealth of the area. The money amassed via contributions and sacrifices from devotees was one of the main sources of economic support for temples.

In Kerala throughout the Middle Ages, temples served more than only religious purposes. They demonstrated a holistic strategy by attending to the community's social, educational, medical, and economic requirements. Local economies benefited from the economic activity that temples created, and the social fabric was strengthened by the assistance that temples gave to community welfare, healthcare, and education.

## Self Assessment

1. Define Sanskritization
2. What do you understand by temple centric society?
3. How did temples function as economic and social institutions in medieval Kerala?
4. Who coined the term sanskritization?
5. Why were *Brahmin* settlements found along river banks?
6. State the number of *Brahmin* settlements in Kerala?
7. What do you know about *Keralolpathi*?

## Assignments

1. Assess the significance of *Brahmin* settlements in the temple-centric society.
2. Examine the ways in which these settlements influenced the religious, cultural, and social aspects of society.
3. Discuss the power dynamics and social hierarchy associated with *Brahmin* settlements and their impact on local communities.
4. Evaluate the process of Sanskritization in the temple-centric society of medieval Kerala.
5. Discuss different views regarding the establishment of *Brahmin* settlements.

## Suggested Readings

1. A P Ibrahim Kunju, *Studies in Medieval Kerala History*, Kerala Historical Society Thiruvananthapuram, 1975.
2. M .G. S Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, Kerala Historical Society, 1972.
3. M. G. S Narayanan, *Foundations of South Indian Society and culture*, New Delhi, 1994.
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## Early Medieval State

### Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner would be able to:

- ♦ analyze the historical significance of the Cheras of Makkotai and their role in shaping the early medieval state in Kerala.
- ♦ compare and contrast the perspectives of Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai and M.G.S. Narayanan on the consolidation of power within the monarchical power structure of early medieval Kerala.
- ♦ examine the evolution of temples as quasi-political units in early medieval Kerala and their impact on governance, administration, and socio-political dynamics.

### Background

The early medieval period in Kerala spans roughly from the 8th to the 12th century CE. During this time, the region witnessed the emergence of powerful dynasties, socio-cultural transformations, and interactions with neighboring kingdoms and maritime traders. Kerala's early medieval state witnessed the rise and fall of various political powers. Several dynasties, such as the Cheras, the Cholas, and the Pandyas, vied for control over the region. Local chieftains, known as Nair and *Nambuthiri* feudal lords, also wielded significant influence. The shifting alliances, conflicts, and power struggles shaped the political landscape and defined the dynamics of governance.

The early medieval period in Kerala was marked by notable socio-cultural transformations. The caste system played a crucial role in societal organization, with *Brahmins* and other communities occupying distinct positions. The spread of Hinduism and the influence of religious institutions, including temples and monastic orders, impacted the socio-cultural fabric of the region. Literature, arts, and architecture flourished, reflecting the cultural vibrancy of the time.

Kerala's strategic location on the western coast facilitated extensive maritime trade and cultural exchanges. Arab, Chinese, and European traders ventured to



the shores of Kerala, bringing with them goods, ideas, and new perspectives. These interactions shaped Kerala's economy, influenced its cultural practices, and contributed to the development of port cities such as Muziris and Kollam. Exploring Kerala's early medieval state offers insights into the roots of its unique socio-cultural identity. The historical developments during this period laid the foundation for the region's subsequent political, social, and economic trajectory.

## Keywords

*Naduvazhis, Nalu Tali, Tali Adhikarikal, Makkotai*

## Discussion

### 2.3.1 Cheras of Makkotai

- ◆ Emergence of powerful dynasties
- ◆ Cheras of Makkotai- dynasty

In the early medieval era, the political landscape of Kerala underwent a profound metamorphosis, marking a significant departure from earlier periods. As various regions and smaller political entities coalesced, a new order began to take shape. This era witnessed the emergence of powerful dynasties, each vying for control and supremacy over the land. The Cheras of Makkotai, one of the most influential and formidable dynasties of the time, stand prominently on this historical stage.

- ◆ Elamkulam- Cheras as Kulasekhara
- ◆ M.G.S. Narayanan - Chera rulers as Perumal

Elamkulam refers to the later Cheras as Kulasekharas, while M. G. S. identifies these rulers as Perumals, as they inherited the honorific title 'Perumal'. There are only a few remnants of the old Cheras' chiefly lineage in the form of names like *Cheraman*, *Makota*, and *Kota*, suggesting no direct descent of the Perumals from the ancient Chera rulers. The early ruling lineage of the chiefdom, centered around Karur, seems to have ended around 300 CE, leading to the emergence of the Perumal kingdom with Makōtai or Mahodayapuram as its capital around 800 CE. Mahodayapuram is the Sanskrit version of kotum-kolur, which later transformed into Kotunkolur. It was also known as Muyirikode, the up-street of the old port, likely existing until the 'Age of the Perumals'. Makotai appears as a personal name appellation for Chera chieftains, as evidenced by a few coins.



◆ Introduction of plough cultivation

However, the period of transformation brings about a noticeable discontinuity that is implicitly acknowledged since the state's formation is believed to occur solely within a stratified society. The stratification of society occurred due to the expansion of plough agriculture across the alluvial plains. This process involved *Brahmin* settlements incorporating local individuals into hereditary occupation groups. Over time, these occupation groups evolved into endogamous caste groups. The emergence of state power, represented by the Perumals, took place within a region that was integrated through the economic differentiation and social stratification facilitated by *Brahmin* settlements. The kingdom of the Perumals was geographically delineated by the presence of the 32 *Brahmin* settlements and their associated territories.

◆ Differences relating to the founder of the dynasty

Unlike the Pandyas and Cholas, the Perumals did not follow a genealogical order of patriarchal inheritance based on primogeniture. Instead, they seemed to embrace the matrilineal system. While the Pandyas and Cholas had distinct alternating cognomen, the Perumals' lack of such names is striking. Elamkulam believed that Kulasekhara Alvar was the founder of this line of rulers. Based on hints from the *Keralolpathi* tradition, supported by epigraphical evidence, the first recorded king of the Perumal lineage is Rama Rajasekhara, referred to as Cheraman Perumal Nayanar by M.G.S. In the Vazhapalli Copper Plate, this Perumal is addressed as *raja rajarajadhiraja paramesvara bhattaraka*. According to Periyapuram, the ministers of the last Chera king, Poraiyan, invited Cheraman Perumal Nayanar to the throne to resolve the predicament caused by the king's renunciation and retirement to the forest. *Keralolpathi* mentions the tradition of *Brahmin* leaders inviting the Perumal from ruling families outside Kerala for a period of twelve years. It is now widely accepted in Kerala's historiography that the founder of the dynasty was Rama Rajasekhara, commonly known as Cheraman Perumal Nayanar. He likely ruled from around 800 to 844 CE.

Sthanu Ravi Kulasekhara (c. 844-883 CE) became the successor of Rama Rajasekhara. The precise date of his ascendance is determined from Sankaranarayana's *Laghubhaskariya Vyakhya*, an astronomical text written in 870 CE, which mentions the year of Perumal's coronation. This Perumal gained recognition through the Terisapally copper plates, documenting the Venad ruler's land grant to Mar Sapir Iso for establishing the Teresa Church in Kollam.

◆ *Epigraphical evidence regarding the rulers*

Although Sthānu Ravi Kulasekhara's final regnal year remains uncertain, the succession of the next Perumal, Kota Ravi Vjayaraga (c. 883-913 CE), is firmly established through inscriptions. Inscriptions from Tirunandikkara refer to *Vijayaraga tevar teviyar* (Queen of King Vijayaraga, daughter of King Kulasekhara), and a Tiruvorriyur inscription confirms Vijayaraga as a Chera king. These inscriptions reveal that Vijayaraga was Sthānu Ravi Kulasekhara's son-in-law, and it is known that his actual name was Kota Ravi. Following him, Kota Kerala Kesari (c. 913- 943 CE) succeeded, but limited information exists about his reign. The chronological certainty of his rule and the subsequent rule of his successor, Indu Kota (c. 943-962 CE), is established through inscriptional analysis, linking them to the next Perumal, Bhaskara Ravi Manukuladitya (962-1021 CE).

◆ *Two or more rulers with the name Bhaskara Ravi*

Elamkulam initially believed there were multiple rulers named Bhaskara Ravi, renowned through the Jewish copper plate. Historians disputed his dates due to a lack of conclusive evidence. Inscriptions of Bhaskara Ravi mention dates based on the position of Jupiter, but the calculations vary. M.G.S. identified two dating series: one starting with Jupiter in Dhanu (December-January), indicating an initial regnal year of 962 CE and ending with Jupiter in Cingam (August-September), marking the fifty-eighth regnal year. The other series began with Jupiter in Metam (April-May), starting from 978 CE and concluding with Jupiter in Tulam (October-November), denoting the forty-third regnal year. One series counted the date from enthronement at the age of eight, while the other counted from the formal coronation at 17. M.G.S. resolved the issue by using two synchronisms: one involving Bhaskara Ravi, Sree Vallabhan Kota, and Govardhana Marthandan, and the other involving Bhaskara Ravi, Kantankari Varman, and Rajendra Chola. The former confirmed that the upper limit fell within the second half of the tenth century CE, while the latter placed the lower limit in the first half of the eleventh century CE.

Ravi Kota Raja Simha (c. 1021-1036 CE) likely succeeded as the subsequent Perumal, closely associated with Rajendra Chola. Perumals named Rajaraja, Ravi Rama Rājāditya, Adityan Kota, and Ranaditya are mentioned in post-Bhaskara Ravi inscriptions (c. 1036-1089 CE). The succession order of these kings remains unknown. However, Rama Kulasekhara (1089 CE-1122 CE) followed as the next Perumal after the last mentioned. While the exact date of Perumal's accession

◆ *Kollam Era*

is uncertain, the Kollam Ramesvarattu Koil inscription clarifies the end of Rama Kulasekhara's rule in the thirteenth year, referencing Jupiter's position and the Kollam Era. The inscription reveals an unfortunate conclusion to Makotai rule, attributed to the displeasure of the *Brahmin* oligarchs.

### 2.3.1.1 Political and Judicial Aspects

◆ *Legal system*

The circulation of resources served as the material basis of the social hierarchy of dependent relations. Customary obligations, derived from hierarchical duties (*katama*), formed the foundation of the present legal system, establishing social connections from top to bottom and bottom to top. It unified society through a self-regulated relationship system. In the Tiruvarruvai copper plates, *Urmura* (the village convention) denotes the customary code of conduct, primarily concerning hierarchical social relations. These customs ensured the smooth functioning of transactions. General customs served as the basis for specific regulations, which were engraved on stone in public areas. These regulations governed aspects such as land rent, associated expenses, conditions, and penalties for non-compliance. They held authority under the customary sanction of *urmura*. The village *sabha*, in conjunction with other authorities, reached unanimous decisions, forming regulatory codes known as *kachams*. These codes upheld and strengthened customs based on social relations, remaining valid as long as the respective institutions persisted.

◆ *Nalutali- advisory councils of the Perumal*

The *Muzhikkulam kacham* serves as a prime example of a regulatory code. *Muzhikkulam*, among the renowned 32 *Brahmin* settlements, stood out as a prominent divine village (*divyadesam*) in Kerala. Situated near the capital of the Perumal, Mahodayapuram, it held significance as one of the four advisory councils (*nalutali*) for the Perumal. The *Keralolpathi* tradition recognizes these four councils as leading bodies among the 32 *Brahmin* villages. Though the *Muzhikkulam* code remains largely unknown, various inscriptions reference it as an authoritative precedent. The essential components of the code are evident in these inscriptions, such as the Chokur inscription during Kota Ravi's fifteenth regnal year (898 ct). Temples from Narayan Kannur in Ezhimala to Arampoli in the south, including Maniyūr, Tirunelli, Chembra, Porangattiri, Ramanattukara, Pukottur, Navayikulam, Alanallur, Tirumirrakode, Triprayar, Talekat, Avittattur, Kumaranellūr, and Kaviyur, contain inscriptions that invoke this code.

◆ Punitive measures

Given the context of inscriptions on the *Muzhikkulam kacham*, which focus on offenses committed by individual *Brahmin* landlords and the corresponding punitive measures, the mentioned passages in these inscriptions remain unchanged. The code explicitly outlines the punitive measures to be imposed upon the individual *Brahmin* landlords of the settlement (*uralar*) who convened the governing assembly (*sabha*) for the settlement. These inscriptions highlight that any violation of the *sabha*'s unanimous decisions by the *uralar* would equate them with the sinners of the *panchamahapatakas* (five great sins), such as matricide, patricide, or killing one's teacher. According to the *Muzhikkulam* code, this would lead to the offender's excommunication, resulting in the loss of caste status, power, and all material possessions. Furthermore, inscriptions emphasize that any significant decision made by the *sabha*, relating to landed property or the rights of the settlers, including non-*Brahmins*, would be reinforced and perpetuated by stating that defiance of such decisions by the *uralar* would be tantamount to committing the *panchamahapataka*.

◆ Elamkulam on Muzhikkulam kacham

Elamkulam believed that the *Muzhikkulam* code aimed to protect tenants cultivating temple lands, with provisions against *uralar* hindering cultivation, misappropriating crops, and denying settlers' rights. However, its main objective appeared to be ensuring rent collection for temple expenses. A Tiruvanvandür inscription from the tenth century, following the *Muzhikkulam* code, forbids any hindrance to temple operations. The Avittattur document of 903 CE implies instances of *Brahmin* landlords oppressing non-*Brahmins* in the village.

◆ M.G.S.- set of regulation of Brahmins

M.G.S. disputes Elamkulam's interpretation of the *Muzhikkulam kacham* as evidence of the king's protective measures for the peasants. The *kacham*, in fact, was not enforced by the royal authority, but rather a set of rules unanimously established by the *Brahmin* landlords. Inscriptions found in temples during that period typically began with the king's name and regnal year, a customary practice that demonstrated the people's awareness of the king's reign, but not necessarily his direct involvement. Elamkulam's use of the term '*Sasanam*' implies that these inscriptions were official proclamations by the king. However, it is plausible that the king was unaware of them, as they pertained to temple affairs or settlements. Consequently, M.G.S. contends that the *Muzhikkulam* regulations were a means for the *Brahmin*



oligarchs to curb their individual dominance and strengthen their collective power, rather than initiatives undertaken by the king to protect the peasants.

◆ Code from four temples

Four other codes from the temple-settlements - Kadankattu, Tavarapur, Sankaramangalam, and Kaitavaram - are mentioned in inscriptions. These codes are referenced in relation to the annexation of Cherman Matevi's royal land to the temple during the twentieth regnal year of Kota Ravi. The Triprangode and Sukapuram documents from the twenty-seventh regnal year of Kota Ravi (910 CE) mention Tavarapur *kacham*, which pertains to the administration of land for meeting the temple's daily expenses. Additionally, the undated Sukapuram inscription documents the payment made to the temple by Tiruvarangur village and prohibits councillors (*sabhalyar*) from impeding cultivation or hindering the temple's daily rituals.

### 2.3.1.2 Locating Power Centres: *Desam* and *Tara*

◆ Fundamental units of economic production

An examination of survey reports, settlement registers, and sociological/geographical studies reveals the *desam* settlement and its regional variants as fundamental units of economic production. These units aimed to establish a sustainable life pattern within traditional village settlements. However, they were not self-sufficient in meeting their economic and social needs. To fulfill these requirements, each settlement had to expand beyond its boundaries, leading to the emergence of *tara* units. Frequently, village community members extended their kinship networks not only beyond the *desam* but also the *tara*, creating an area known as the *Nadu*. In essence, the *desam*, *tara*, and *Nadu* were organic units that naturally evolved and were not imposed by political authorities for administrative convenience. As spontaneously formed units of economic production, they possess a primarily geographical nature.

#### i) *Nadus* and *Naduvazhis*

In Kerala, there were numerous *Nadus*, both small and large, governed by chieftains known as *Naduvazhis*. Venad, Keezhmalainadu, Purakilanatu, Kalkkarainatu, Valluvanatu, Erajanatu, Kurumporainatu, Nanrulainatu, Kolattunatu, Netumpurayurnatu, Vempalanatu, and Munjinatu held prominence during this era. *Nadus* represent naturally-evolved settlements that have achieved socio-

- ◆ *Nadu- local level economic and socio cultural development*

cultural integration and consolidation over many centuries. Each *Nadu* reflects localized economic and socio-cultural progress over an extended timeframe. The term *Nadu* is derived either from the root word *Nadu* (to plant) or *nata* (to walk in), signifying an agrarian settlement. Its Sanskrit equivalent is *janapada*. In the Dravidian region, *Nadu* is a magnified representation of a community.

- ◆ *Nattutayavar - ruler of Nadu*
- ◆ *Ayiravar, Munnurruvar-warriors*

Each *Nadu* had a ruler known as *Nattutayavar* (owner of the *Nadu*) and a warrior group consisting of a hundred soldiers (*nuttuvakkuttam*). Nantulainatu's *Naduvazhi* had *munnnuttuvar* (the three hundred), Venad had *arunuttuvar* (the six hundred), Keezhmalainadu had *elunuttuvar* (the seven hundred), and so forth. Engaging in power dynamics, the Perumal, possessing abundant resources, particularly cultural power gained through their alliance with the *Brahmins*, held dominance over them with their *ayiravar* (the thousand) warriors. This practice is an extension of an early tradition mentioned in the *Arthasasthra* by Mulaparisha, referred to as *utankuttam* (the intimate bodyguards or companions of honor), erroneously interpreted as an administrative assembly in textbooks.

- ◆ *Venad and Keezhmalainadu were wealthy and powerful*

Venad and Keezhmalainadu were affluent and influential *Nadus*. Venad thrived in agriculture and trade, which bolstered their political power evident in land and people granted through copper plate charters like Terisapally and Mampalli plates. Keezhmalainadu, on the other hand, possessed valuable hill produce with overseas demand, stimulating both domestic and international trade. While Kōlattunātu had the largest geographical extent, it lacked agricultural wealth and relied on trade revenue derived from forest produce and valuable inland crops. It seems that the *Nadus* had to pay *attaikkol* to Perumal, as inscriptions highlight various taxes imposed on merchants, indicating a systematic appropriation of trade revenue.

Among the *Nadus*, Venad stood out as relatively prominent. However, due to insufficient evidence, it is challenging to establish a comprehensive chronological list of rulers in Venad. The Terisapally copper plates, dated around 849 CE, mention Ayyanatikal as a ruler of Venad who possessed the authority to grant land, exempt individuals from taxes, and exercise jurisdiction over subjects, all with the knowledge of the Perumal. The presence of functionaries such as *atikarar* (authority), *prakrti* (clients), *pati* (lord), and

- ◆ Exercise of supreme authority over the Nadu by Perumal

*ainnuttuvar* in the records suggests that the ruler commanded a well-structured local administrative system. The Mampalli copper plate, discovered as the earliest record in the Kollam Era, references another Venad ruler named Vallabhan Kota, believed to have lived in the tenth century. Vallabhan Kōta's successor was Govardha Marthanda, who is mentioned as one of the witnesses in the Jewish copper plate of Bhaskara Ravi (1000 CE). The Trikkodithanam inscription also alludes to Govardha Marthanda.

- ◆ Kuru system-sharing of property-power through sthanams

The power of *Nattutayavar* was governed by the *kuru* system, which regulated inheritance and the allocation of political rights and privileges. The *kuru* system involved sharing property and power based on seniority, known as sthanams or positions of authority. This framework allowed for the presence of multiple centers of power within a single territory. The Terisapally record provides an example where the junior prince (*ilankuru*) was present during the execution of a deed by Ayyanatikal, the ruling *muttakuru* (elder). The *kuru* system of inheritance was also followed in the northern regions of Kerala.

- Position of chieftains

The Tirunelli temple inscription indicates that the grant was registered by the *muttakuru* rulers of Kurumporainatu and Purakilanatu. Another record from Bhaskara Ravi, dated to 1000 CE, mentions five *Nattutayavar* who signed a charter issued to Joseph Rabban, a prominent Jewish merchant leader. These *Nattutayavar* represented Venad, Vempolinatu, Eralanadu, Valluvanadu, and Netumpuraiyurnadu. It is evident that these *nadus* were historically significant regions for the production and distribution of goods. Their rulers belonged to ancient lineages and held the position of chieftains.

### 2.3.2.Consolidation of Power – Monarchical Power Structure

The political structure under the Perumal rule followed a monarchical system, as evident from contemporary inscriptions. The Valapalli copper plates address the Perumal as *raja raja rajadhiraja*, indicating the imposition of overlordship (*koima*) upon local rulers, known as *Nattutayavar*, whose authority was hereditary. Other inscriptions also mention the assumption of overlordship through phrases like *konmai kontan* and *konoinmai kontan*. In the Terisapally copper plate and the

◆ Political structure of the Perumal rule-Monarchy

Jewish copper plate, the Perumal's royal qualifications, such as *marukutalai cirantatippattutala* (subduing the enemy) and *palanarayirattantu cenkol natattiyala* (reigning for hundreds of years), clearly demonstrate the sovereign power held over the local chieftains.

► Naduvazhi

Instances can be found where the Perumal interfered in the inheritance of the *Naduvazhi* and appointed their preferred individuals as rulers. Inscriptions reveal that the Perumal collected *attaiko* (revenue) even from distant areas like Pullur Kotavalam near Kanhangad. The *Naduvazhis*, however, did not possess the authority to make significant decisions concerning the transfer of resources or execution of contracts. Ayyanatikal, the *Naduvazhi* of Venad, grants land and service personnel in the presence of the *koiladhikarikal* (the junior prince). Notably, the mention of the primary sanction regarding the land grant, along with special rights and privileges, is jointly made by the *koiladhikari* and the *Naduvazhi*.

◆ Influence of Brahmins

Nevertheless, the monarchical power was under the influence of the prominent brahmin. The Perumal's power structure revolved around the four prominent *Brahmin* settlements: Muzhikkulam, Airanikkalam, Paravur, and Irinjalakuda. These settlements served as the core of his authority. The authorities of these settlements formed the *nalutali*, which was the royal council consisting of four temples. Each temple represented the headquarters of the respective *Brahmin* settlement, and the term *tali* symbolized the individuals in positions of authority over the temple (*taliadhikarikal*). These were the influential *Brahmin* landlords. It appears that the larger council of the king consisted of notable *Naduvazhis* in addition to the *Nalutali*.

◆ Exercise of supreme authority by the Perumal over the Nadu

Various inscriptions provide evidence of the deep-rooted existence of the Kautilyan monarchy within the political system. The Arthashastra's concept of *saptanga*, consisting of seven limbs of the state, finds mention in most regions. These include *swami* (the king), *amatya* (the minister), *atikarar* (authorities or officers), *janapada* (territory), *durga* (fort, the *matil*), *kosa* (the treasury, the *panthtaramam*), *danda* (the army), and *mitra* (friends). Copper plates, in particular, contain references to these elements. The Perumals held supremacy over the rulers or chieftains of each *Nadu*. Notably, there is at least one instance documented in the Trikadithanam inscriptions where the ruler of Venad, Govardhana



Mārthandan, was appointed by Bhaskara Ravi Perumal as the ruler of Nanrulainātu as well. This act exemplifies the Perumal's supreme authority over the chief of a *Nadu*.

- ◆ Patronage given to merchant bodies

The Terisapally copper plates reveal the remarkable influence of *Manigramam*, a foreign merchant group, as they were able to obtain a grant for a community settlement and market town. Similarly, the Jewish copper plate charter issued by Bhaskara Ravi Varma Perumal in 1000 CE bestowed aristocratic privileges upon Joseph Rabban, the leader of *anchuvannam*, the most prominent overseas trading organization of that era. This exemplifies the political importance attached to such patronage. Overseas merchants held substantial power at sea, commanding a fleet of vessels. M.G.S., in his observations, suggests that elevating the leader of an overseas trading group to princely status and granting control over the port town near Muyirikode, where the Perumal's palace was located, carried additional political significance in light of the potential naval threat posed by the Cholas.

- ◆ Oligarchic corporations of the Nalutali-centred Brāhmin settlements

Among the various powers, the oligarchic corporations of *Nalutali*-centric brahmin settlements in and around Mahodayapuram, the Perumal's headquarters, held the utmost influence. These corporations formed the core of the contemporary power structure, representing other temple-centric *Brahmin* settlements and their collective entities. Over time, the Perumal's sovereign control, which initially prevailed, gradually diminished and eventually disappeared entirely during the reign of Ramavarma Kulasekhara. He was compelled to abdicate his throne and seek exile.

### 2.3.2.1 Versions of Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai and M.G.S. Narayanan

- ◆ Arguments of Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai and M.G.S. Narayanan

The consolidation of power within the monarchical structure was a significant aspect of the Cheras of Makkotai's reign. Scholars like Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai and M.G.S. Narayanan has provided valuable insights into different versions of this power consolidation. Let's explore their perspectives in the following discussions.

Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai, a prominent historian, delved into the consolidation of power during the Chera rule, offering a unique perspective on their governance structure. Elamkulam's version emphasizes a centralized and hierarchical monarchical system that formed the foundation of Chera authority. In Elamkulam's interpretation, the king

- ◆ *King -holding highest authority*
- ◆ *Ultimate decision maker*

stood as the paramount figure within the Chera kingdom, holding the highest authority and wielding significant power. The king's role extended beyond mere symbolism, as they actively participated in the administration of the kingdom. They maintained control over various administrative and military aspects, ensuring the smooth functioning of governance and safeguarding the interests of the kingdom. As the ultimate decision-maker, the king played a pivotal role in formulating policies, implementing laws, and resolving disputes. Their decisions carried immense weight and were regarded as binding. Elamkulam highlighted the king's ability to exercise absolute power, which contributed to the stability and unity of the Chera kingdom.

- ◆ *Network of officials*

Under this hierarchical system, the king was supported by a network of officials and administrators who helped in the efficient functioning of the government. These officials included ministers, council members, and local administrators who acted as intermediaries between the king and the subjects. Elamkulam emphasized the importance of these officials in implementing the king's policies and maintaining order throughout the kingdom. Furthermore, Elamkulam's version underscores the role of the king as a unifying force. The king was responsible for fostering a sense of unity among the various regions and communities within the Chera kingdom. They actively engaged in diplomatic affairs, forming alliances with neighboring dynasties and conducting diplomatic negotiations to secure the kingdom's interests.

- ◆ *Centralised authority*

Elamkulam's interpretation of the consolidation of power reflects a centralized authority structure in which the king served as the linchpin of governance. The king's ability to exercise control over administrative and military matters, make important decisions, and foster unity contributed to the stability and cohesion of the Chera kingdom. It is important to note that while Elamkulam's version provides valuable insights, it represents one perspective among several historical interpretations. The study of multiple viewpoints allows for a comprehensive understanding of the Chera rule and the dynamics of power consolidation during the ancient and early medieval periods in Kerala.

M.G.S. Narayanan, a renowned historian, presents an alternative perspective on the consolidation of power within the Chera monarchical structure. Narayanan's version diverges from the centralized authority model proposed



- ◆ M.G.S.- more decentralised power
- ◆ Shared authority between the King and Naduvazhi

by Elamkulam emphasizes a more decentralized power structure. According to Narayanan's interpretation, the Chera kingdom operated with a system of shared authority between the king and regional chiefs known as *Naduvazhis*. These *Naduvazhis* held significant influence and autonomy in governing their respective territories. They acted as powerful local administrators who wielded considerable control over their regions, including matters of governance, justice, and revenue collection. In M.G.S.'s version, the *Naduvazhis* formed a network of regional power centres that operated alongside the central authority of the king. These power centres played a crucial role in the overall stability and administration of the Chera kingdom. The *Naduvazhis* represented the interests of their regions, maintained law and order, and managed local affairs in accordance with the broader principles set by the central authority.

- ◆ Relation of cooperation and mutual respect
- ◆ Naduvazhis enjoyed some sort of autonomy

The relationship between the king and the *Naduvazhis* was one of cooperation and mutual respect. While the king retained ultimate authority, the *Naduvazhis* enjoyed a significant degree of autonomy in their territories. This decentralized structure allowed for efficient governance and effective management of the vast Chera kingdom. M.G.S.'s version emphasizes the importance of regional power centres in the Chera monarchical structure. The existence of these Centres facilitated effective governance, as the *Naduvazhis* possessed local knowledge, cultural understanding, and close proximity to the people they governed. This decentralized model also enabled the Chera kingdom to adapt and respond to regional needs and challenges.

### 2.3.3. Evolution of Temple as a Quasi-Political Unit

- Nalutali

Over time, temples in the region grew beyond their religious functions and became significant centres of political and social influence. We already discussed the land grants to the temples and the establishment of the temple centred society in the previous unit. Here we discuss the political power exercised by the temples and also the arrangements that had been formed for the management of the temples. Temple committee were free from the wrath of kings and feudatories. As stated earlier, *Nalutali* were four temple group that served a significant administrative function. *Brahmins* exerted institutional control over the affairs of Perumals through the *Nalutali*.

► Temple  
adminis-  
tration

To manage the affairs of each temple, a committee known as the *Sabha* was established for a specified period of time. Its members, who were primarily *Brahmins*, were affectionately referred to as *Aryar* or *Sabha Aryar*. However, the Potuval or Secretary chosen by the committee oversaw the temple's daily operations. In certain cases the temples were managed by executive committees of two members. Additionally, the *kuttam*, *desavazhi*, and *Naduvazhi* held certain privileges over the temples. The neighbourhood *kuttams* held the *sabhas* accountable for their deeds. The *Koiladikarikal*, a person chosen by the monarch, held the overarching power over the administration of temples. This crucial position was typically filled by the heir apparent, but during Sthanu Ravi's reign, his son-in-law Vijayaragadeva occupied it. In this context, the *Muzhikulam Kacham*, which established stringent guidelines for the management of temple assets and the conduct of temple affairs, may also be mentioned. These rules and regulations were created by the *Naduvazhis* and members of the temple committees at a meeting held in the 9th century CE. at Muzhikulam.

► Code of  
conduct

Although the exact details of the code of conduct imposed at Muzhikulam are unknown, inscriptional evidence suggests that it served as an effective safeguard against theft of temple assets and cash by the *Uralar* (trustees) as well as negligence of duty on the side of the *Karalar* (tenants). The *Karalar*, or renters, who failed to pay on their temple dues, also received similar punishments. Inscriptions from the time period have been found in Kerala from Tirunelli to Tirunandikara (Kanyakumari district), and several of them make reference to the *Muzhikulam Kacham*. The other *Kacham* of the time, such as the *Kadamkattu Kacham*, *Kottuvayiraveli Kacham*, *Tavanur Kacham*, and *Sankaramangalam Kacham*, similarly established guidelines for landlord-tenant relationships with regard to temple lands. The administrative setup resembled that of a small-scale government, further establishing the quasi-political nature of temples.

► Significant  
political  
power

Temples played a pivotal role in fostering community cohesion, resolving disputes, and providing welfare services. Due to their economic prosperity, land holdings, and community influence, temples began exerting significant political clout. Temple authorities often had close ties with local rulers and played a crucial role in decision-making processes. They could influence political appointments, mediate disputes, and contribute to governance at the local level.



◆ *Administrative bodies-agricultural communities*

When tribal populations were getting transformed into peasants and getting drawn into caste societies, the role of temples held great significance. These temples came under the management of corporations formed by individuals residing in *Brahmin* settlements. Acting as administrative bodies for agricultural communities, these corporations controlled the temple's wealth and land, thus exerting influence over large segments of the population.

◆ *Brahminical corporation*

Temple institutions possessed substantial political power within their localities. This can be most clearly observed in the Chera kingdom of Kerala, where the monarchical state was relatively weaker compared to other regions in South India. Moreover, local groups enjoyed extensive powers within the political structure of this region. Organized around the temple, Brahminical corporations consisting of non-cultivating intermediaries gained immense authority in fiscal, judicial, and political administration, roles traditionally associated with the state. The growth of temple-centred *Brahmin* settlements is evidenced by historical records found on copper plates like the Tiruvalla Copper Plates and Huzur Office Plates.

◆ *Revenue-judicial function*

It is important to note that the temples collected revenue, which was originally the power of the state. The chief of Vempolinadu granted villages to the temple, authorizing the temple committee to collect taxes in the form of paddy, gold, and land. Such fiscal arrangements were typical of land grants prevalent in Indian feudalism. The temple committee assumed responsibilities of revenue collection, judicial administration, and addressing grievances. In cases of defaulting on payment, the temple trustees had the power to seize village properties. Furthermore, the chief of KeezhmalaiNadu also granted land to the temple. Failure to deliver supplies to the temples on time resulted in the imposition of fines.

◆ *Temples wielding powers*

It is important to note that this is not the concept of theocracy or "temple-states." Instead, it represented a situation where the temple wielded powers typically associated with the state. The role of temples in medieval South India extended far beyond being mere religious institutions, encompassing social, economic, political, and cultural functions.

## Summarised Overview

As Sreedhara Menon stated, with the restoration of Chera power under Kulasekhara Varman in around 800 CE, the protracted “historical night” that followed the Sangam era came to an end. From 800 until 1102 CE, Kerala was controlled by an illustrious line of monarchs known as the Kulasekharas, who had their capital at Tiruvanchikulam or Mahodayapuram. Elamkulam’s new scientific analysis of the inscriptions from the era has shed light on the history of the Kulasekhara Empire, also known as the Second Chera Empire. Our understanding of Kerala’s early history has a significant vacuum that has been filled in large part by the reconstruction of the history of the Kulasekharas. The Second Chera Empire’s history makes it clearly evident that Kerala was a unified political entity for at least three centuries, from 800 to 1102 CE, when the Kulasekharas ruled the region with their capital at Mahodayapuram. The time period saw a exceptional advancements made in literature, theology, the arts, and commerce.

The ruler was known as Perumal, also known as Kulasekhara Perumal or Cheraman Perumal. He held the position of chief administrative officer. For administrative reasons, the Kingdom was split up into a number of *Nadus*, or provinces. Feudatory chieftains chosen by the king or hereditary *Naduvazhis* oversaw the governance of the *Nadus*, or provinces. None of them had any independent status. A number of *desams*, each under a *Desavazhi*, were subdivided into each *Nadu* of the Kulasekhara Empire. The local *Kuttams*, which were representative bodies, had total power over the *Desavazhis*. The empire’s tax system is also revealed by the epigraphic records of the time. Sales tax, professional tax, and other taxes were referenced in different records. The state also made a significant amount of money through customs taxes collected at ports.

Additionally, the Kulasekharas had a strong army and fleet. The youth of the country received instruction in the art of fighting at military institutions or academies. In times of war operations, the navy provided the army its fullest cooperation. It is noteworthy to note that the people of Kerala were familiar with navigation concepts from an early age, and their reputation in this area was upheld throughout the Kulasekhara era as well. The *Nadus* also had their own army, referred as *Nattuvakuttam*. Elamkulam and M.G.S. provide different views regarding the nature of political structure of Perumals.

The Chera emperor and the *Naduvazhis* consistently worked to gain the support and cooperation of the merchant guilds, and in order to accomplish this, they granted them significant rights and privileges. Temples exerted political power through various organisations like *Nalutali*. Through land grants, the temple emerged as the largest land lord and greatest political power centre.



## Self Assessment

1. Who were the Cheras of Makkotai?
2. Name the capital city of Perumals.
3. Identify one key factor that contributed to the evolution of temples as quasi-political units in the early medieval Kerala.
4. Mention the importance of *Nalutali*.
5. Name the temples in the organisation of *Nalutali*.
6. Define *Nadu*.
7. What do you know about *desam*.
8. What do you know about *Muzhikkulam Kacham*?

## Assignments

1. Assess the role and significance of the Cheras of Makkotai in shaping the early medieval Kerala.
2. Analyse the administration of Cheras of Makkotai.
3. Compare the interpretations of Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai and M.G.S. Narayanan regarding the centralization of authority of Perumals.
4. Analyze the evolution of temples as quasi-political units in medieval Kerala.

## Suggested Readings

1. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai(ed.), *Elamkulam Kunjanpillayute therenjedutha krithikal*, International Centre for Kerala Studies, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 2005.
2. K. Sivathamby, *Studies in Ancient Tamil Society*, New Century Book House, Madras, 1998.
3. *Kerala Through the Ages*, Department of Public Relations, Thiruvananthapuram, 1980.
4. M. G .S Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, Current Books Thrissur, 2018.



5. M. G. S Narayanan, *Foundations of South Indian Society and Culture*, New Delhi, 1994.
6. M. G. S Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat, '*Bhakti Movement in South India*', in S C Malik (ed.), *Dissent Protest and Reform in Indian Civilization*, Shimla, 1980.
7. M. G. S Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, Kerala Historical Society, 1972.

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1. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier, *Cultural History of Kerala*, Vol. I, Dept of Cultural; Publications Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999.
2. Raghava Varier and Rajan Gurukkal, *Kerala Charithram*, Vol.I. and II, Current Books, Kottayam, 2004.
3. Raghava Varier, *Keraliyatha Charithra Mangal*, Current Books, Kottayam, 1990.
4. Rajan Gurukkal, *Social Formation in Early South India*, OUP, Delhi, 2010.
5. Rajan Gurukkal, '*From Clan and Lineage to Hereditary Occupation to Caste*', in Deve Nathan (ed.), *From Tribe to Caste*, Shimla, 1997.
6. Rajan Gurukkal, *Mithu Charithram Samuham*, SPCS, Cosmo Books, Thrissur.



## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



## New Formations in Economy and Society

### Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner would be able to:

- ◆ evaluate the role and significance of trade corporations, such as *Anchuvannam*, *Manigramam-Valanchiyar*, and *Nanadesikal*, in shaping the economy and society of medieval Kerala.
- ◆ examine the historical importance of Terisappalli and Jewish Copper plates in understanding the religious and cultural landscape of early Kerala.
- ◆ analyze the cultural symbiosis of Kerala through the study of Jain, Buddhist, Jewish, and Arab settlements, and understand the influences and interactions between these communities and the local population.
- ◆ explore the Bhakti traditions in Kerala, focusing on the contributions of *Alvars* and *Nayanars*, and their impact on religious practices, devotional literature, and social cohesion in medieval Kerala.

### Background

The unit examine the trade corporations like *Anchuvannam* and *Manigramam*, that played a significant role in shaping Kerala's economy. It also deals with the *Valanchiyar* and *Nanadesikal*, highlighting their contributions to trade and commerce in the region.

Moving forward, we will explore the historical significance of Terisappalli and Jewish Copper plates. These artifacts provide valuable insights into the cultural exchanges that took place in Kerala. This study will also encompass the various settlements that emerged in Kerala, including Jain, Buddhist, Jewish, and Arab communities. The unit also examine the cultural symbiosis that occurred as a result of interactions between these settlements and the local population.

The unit also discuss The Bhakti traditions in Kerala, with a focus on the *Alvars* and *Nayanars*. These religious movements played a transformative role in shaping Kerala's spiritual and social fabric.



## Keywords

Trade corporations, *Anchuvannam*, *Manigramam*, *Valanchiyar*, *Nanadesikal*, Terisappalli Copper Plates, Jainism, Buddhism, Arab Settlements, *Alvars*, *Nayanars*

## Discussion

### 2.4.1 Trade Corporations - *Anchuvannam*, *Manigramam*-*Valanchiyar* and *Nanadesikal*

- ◆ Trade Corporations

During the medieval period in Kerala, trade corporations emerged as key players in the region's economy. These trade corporations, such as *Anchuvannam*, *Manigramam-Valanchiyar*, and *Nanadesikal*, played a crucial role in shaping the economic landscape and facilitating trade and commerce.

#### 2.4.1.1 *Anchuvannam*

- ◆ Five major merchant groups or guilds
- ◆ Expertise in trade and commerce

*Anchuvannam* was a prominent trade corporation in Kerala during ancient and medieval times. The word *Anchuvannam* is derived from the Malayalam term *ancu*, which means five, and *vannam*, which means guild or association. The *Anchuvannam* guild consisted of five major merchant groups or guilds that operated in different regions of Kerala. These five guilds were known as *Anchuvannam Muri*, and each had its specific area of expertise in trade and commerce. The guilds within *Anchuvannam* were involved in various commercial activities, including spice trade, textile production, metalwork, and banking. They played a significant role in the flourishing trade networks of Kerala, particularly in the export of spices like pepper, cardamom, and cinnamon. *Anchuvannam* guilds had their own codes of conduct, regulations, and internal hierarchies that governed their activities. The guilds established trade relationships with merchants from other regions, both within India and with foreign traders, facilitating extensive trade networks. Through their commercial endeavors, *Anchuvannam* contributed to the economic growth and prosperity of Kerala.

#### 2.4.1.2 *Manigramam*

*Manigramam* was another prominent trade corporation in Kerala that thrived during ancient and medieval times. The term *Manigramam* is derived from the Tamil word *Mani*, meaning gem, and *Gramam*, meaning village or association. *Manigramam* primarily focused on money lending and

- ◆ *Manigramam- money lending and banking activities*
- ◆ *Intermediaries between buyers and sellers*

banking activities. The members of *Manigramam* were skilled in money management, investment, and financial transactions. They provided loans to traders, farmers, and individuals in need, thereby supporting economic activities in the region. *Manigramam* also played a crucial role in facilitating trade, acting as intermediaries between buyers and sellers, and ensuring smooth financial transactions. The members of *Manigramam* were known for their integrity, expertise in finance, and trustworthiness in managing monetary affairs. They contributed to the stability of the economy by providing a reliable system of credit and financial services. *Manigramam's* influence extended beyond Kerala, as they were involved in trade with merchants from other regions of India and foreign traders as well. Overall, both *Anchuvannam* and *Manigramam* were instrumental in shaping the economic landscape of Kerala. They played vital roles in trade, commerce, finance, and banking, contributing to the prosperity of the region and fostering economic interactions with other parts of India and beyond.

#### 2.4.1.3 *Valanchiyar*

- ◆ *Valanchiyar- specialized in specific commodities or industries*

*Valanchiyar* was a significant group within the trade corporations of Kerala. The term *Valanchiyar* refers to a group of merchants or traders who specialized in specific commodities or industries. They were known for their expertise in trade, particularly in specific goods such as spices, textiles, or precious metals. *Valanchiyar* members formed their own associations or guilds, establishing trade networks and partnerships. These guilds played a crucial role in the procurement, distribution, and marketing of specific goods, ensuring their availability in local and international markets. *Valanchiyar* merchants were involved in the export of spices, including pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, and other valuable commodities. They maintained trade links with foreign traders, contributing to the growth of international trade and fostering economic relations with distant regions. *Valanchiyar* merchants were highly respected for their business acumen, market knowledge, and negotiation skills. They actively participated in trade fairs, markets, and commercial exchanges, creating opportunities for economic growth and expansion.

#### 2.4.1.4 *Nanadesikal*

*Nanadesikal* was another important group within the trade corporations of Kerala. The term "*Nanadesikal*" refers to merchants who specialized in long-distance trade and



- ◆ *Nanadesikal- specialized in long-distance trade*
- ◆ *Skilled in navigation, shipbuilding, maritime trade*

had extensive connections with distant regions. *Nanadesikal* merchants were involved in overseas trade, establishing trade links with merchants from other parts of India and foreign countries. They played a significant role in the export and import of goods, contributing to the expansion of trade networks and economic development. *Nanadesikal* merchants were skilled in navigation, shipbuilding, and maritime trade, enabling them to undertake long sea voyages and engage in international commerce. They ventured to regions such as the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and East Africa, facilitating cultural exchanges and commercial activities. The *Nanadesikal* merchants brought back valuable goods, including luxury items, textiles, precious metals, and spices, enriching the local markets and stimulating economic growth. Their trade activities contributed to the cultural symbiosis of Kerala by fostering connections and interactions with diverse cultures and communities.

- ◆ *Growth of Kerala's economy*
- ◆ *Facilitated trade and commerce*
- ◆ *Maintained economic stability*

*Valanchiyar* and *Nanadesikal* were influential groups within the trade corporations of Kerala, each specializing in different aspects of trade. *Valanchiyar* focused on specific commodities and industries, while *Nanadesikal* merchants engaged in long-distance and overseas trade. Together, they played a crucial role in the economic development, cultural exchange, and prosperity of Kerala, shaping the region's history and contributing to its vibrant trade networks. These corporations facilitated trade and commerce in Kerala and beyond. They engaged in various commercial activities such as banking, money lending, and overseas trade. The trade corporations had their own codes of conduct and regulations. They played a crucial role in maintaining economic stability and fostering business relationships. The corporations were involved in the exchange of goods, including spices, textiles, and precious metals. They had established networks and connections with other trade centers, both within India and abroad. The trade corporations contributed to the growth of Kerala's economy and played a significant role in its prosperity. Their activities influenced the social and cultural aspects of Kerala's society.

- ◆ *Internal as well as external trade was facilitated*

**Trade and Economic Activities:** *Nadu* played a vital role in trade and commerce, facilitating interregional and international exchanges. Ports and trading centres within each region fostered economic growth, contributing to the prosperity and development of local communities.

**Ports and Trading Centres:** Each *Nadu* had its prominent ports and trading centres that served as hubs for commercial

- ◆ Ports-trading Centres-commercial activities, cultural confluences

activities. These centres facilitated the exchange of goods, ideas, and cultural influences between different regions, as well as with foreign traders. Malabar, with its strategic coastal location, had thriving ports such as Calicut (Kozhikode) and Kannur (Cannanore). These ports attracted merchants from various parts of the world, including Arab, Chinese, and European traders, who engaged in the trade of spices, textiles, precious stones, and other commodities.

- ◆ Specialized in products based on the geographical advantages-resources

**Interregional Trade:** The presence of distinct *Nadus* created opportunities for interregional trade, as each region specialized in specific products based on their geographical advantages and resources. Trade networks were established, connecting different *Nadus* and facilitating the exchange of goods and services. The Cochin located on the Malabar Coast, was renowned for its spice trade. Merchants from the Kochi region established trade links with other *Nadus*, such as the Travancore known for its agricultural produce, and the Palakkad *Nadu* known for its forest resources. This interregional trade contributed to economic growth and cultural exchange.

- ◆ Coastal location-significant hub for maritime trade routes

**International Trade:** The ports within *Nadu* also facilitated international trade, attracting merchants from foreign lands and fostering economic ties with distant regions. The coastal location of Kerala made it a significant hub for maritime trade routes. Venad, with its strategic location along the Arabian Sea, played a vital role in the international trade network. Traders from the Venad region engaged in maritime trade with countries like Arabia, Persia, China, and Europe, exchanging goods such as spices, textiles, ivory, and precious metals.

- ◆ Revenue from trade used to improve infrastructure facilities
- ◆ For promoting arts and literature

**Economic Prosperity:** The trade and economic activities within *Nadu* had a significant impact on the prosperity and development of local communities. The revenue generated from trade supported the growth of infrastructure, patronage of arts and literature, and the establishment of educational institutions and religious centres. The Valluvanad, known for its agricultural productivity, experienced economic prosperity through trade in agricultural commodities like rice, spices, and timber. This wealth contributed to the growth of the region's cultural and intellectual spheres, with the support of local rulers and merchants.

The trade and economic activities within *Nadu* created a vibrant commercial landscape, stimulating economic



- ◆ Trade promotes economic growth and cultural exchange

growth and cultural exchange. The ports, trading centres, and trade networks established during this period laid the foundation for Kerala's historical significance as a hub of trade and commerce. Exploring the trade dynamics within *Nadu* provides valuable insights into the economic vitality and interconnectedness of Early Medieval Kerala.

### 2.4.2 Terisappalli and Jewish Copper Plates

- ◆ Terisappalli Copper Plates-Ayyanatikal Tiruvatikal
- ◆ Grant land with a number of rights and privileges

The Terisappalli Copper Plate of Ayyan Atikal Tiruvatikal dated 849 CE, (The 5th regnal year of Emperor Sthanu Ravi) is the first important Kerala inscription the date of which has been determined with any degree of accuracy. The intention of the inscription is to give a piece of land, along with a number of rights and privileges, to the Terisappalli in Kurakkeni Kollam. The grant was made in the presence of important officers of the state including the *Koiladhikarikal* and the representatives of trade corporations or merchant guilds like *Anchuvannam* and *Manigramam*. This record includes consideration of the *Arunuttuvar* (Six Hundred) local assembly. Due to the fact that many taxes, including car taxes, sales taxes, and profession taxes, are referenced in it, it also sheds information on the taxation system that was in place in early Venad. The Terisappalli Copper Plate also bears witness to the wise practise of religious toleration by the ancient Kerala kings.

- ◆ Jewish Copper Plates of Bhaskara Ravi Varma
- ◆ Land grants to Jewish community

The Jewish Copper Plates, also known as *Sasanam*, are important historical documents that shed light on the Jewish settlements in Kerala during ancient and medieval times. These copper plates were issued by local rulers and granted various privileges and rights to the Jewish community. The Jewish Copper Plates are written in a script known as the "Copper plate-*Sasanam* script" and provide insights into the social and legal status of the Jewish community in Kerala. These plates serve as evidence of the presence of Jewish settlements in Kerala and highlight the cosmopolitan nature of the region during that time. The Jewish Copper Plates indicate that the Jewish settlers enjoyed religious freedom, held prominent positions in society, and were granted certain privileges, including land grants and autonomy in the administration of their settlements. They also demonstrate the interaction and integration of the Jewish community with other communities in Kerala, through trade and cultural exchanges. The Jewish Copper Plates are valuable historical artifacts that showcase the multiculturalism and religious tolerance that existed in ancient Kerala.

- ◆ Immense historical importance

Terisappalli and the Jewish Copper Plates hold immense historical importance in Kerala. Terisappalli signifies the early presence of Christianity and its integration into the region, while the Jewish Copper Plates provide evidence of Jewish settlements and highlight the cultural diversity and religious tolerance that characterised Kerala during ancient and medieval times. These artifacts are vital in understanding Kerala's rich historical tapestry and its connections with early religious and trade networks.

### 2.4.3 Jain, Buddhist, Jewish and Arab Settlements- Cultural Symbiosis of Kerala

- ◆ Presence of Jain temples, statues, and inscriptions
- ◆ Jain merchants- vital role in the economic growth

Jainism, an ancient Indian religion, found its way into Kerala during ancient times, leaving traces of its presence in the region. Jain settlements in Kerala, particularly in the coastal areas, thrived and interacted with local communities, contributing to the cultural exchange and assimilation. The influence of Jainism can be seen in architectural elements, such as the presence of Jain temples, statues, and inscriptions, which are significant historical remnants of the Jain presence in Kerala. Jain merchants, known for their trading acumen, played a vital role in the economic growth of Kerala, contributing to trade networks and fostering cultural interactions. Jain settlements in Kerala have a history dating back to ancient times, with evidence of their presence found in various regions. Here are more details, including examples and approximate years:

- ◆ Mathilakam, Kudalmanikkam- believed to be jain shrine
- ◆ Later converted to Hindu temple

There were several Jain temples and shrines in ancient Kerala, and some of them still survive as Hindu shrines today after going through a transition process. There was a well-known Jain temple at Mathilakam to which numerous other temples nearby were subordinate, but it eventually changed its identity to a Hindu shrine. Even as late as 1400 CE, according to the Malayalam text *Kokasandesam*, Brahmins never entered the Mathilakam temple. This may have been because it was formerly a Jain shrine. Some academics assert that the Kudalmanikkam temple at Irinjalakuda, which is devoted to Bharata, Sri Rama's brother, was formerly a Jain shrine and was changed into a Hindu temple with the demise of Jainism. The deity that was initially erected in the Kudalmanikkam temple is said to be a Jain Digambara, most likely Bharateswara. When Jainism was in decline, the Jain shrine Bharateswara was converted to a Hindu shrine and dedicated to Bharata.



- ◆ Kallil-  
Parswanatha,  
Mahavira  
Tirthankara, and  
Padmavathi Devi
- ◆ Ganapati Vattam,  
Edakkal Cave-  
Wayanad

The region of Kallil, which is close to Perumbavur, still possesses an ancient Jain temple inside of a natural rock-cut cave, suggesting that it was once a major Jain centre. Images of Parswanatha, Mahavira Tirthankara, and Padmavathi Devi (Pattini) have been erected within the temple. This was also converted into a Bhagavathi temple later. In prehistoric Kerala, Jainism had significant centres in areas like Ganapati Vattam, also known as Sultan Battery, Manantoddy, and other places in the Wayanad region. Jain inscriptions from the Kadamba and Hoysala dynasties may be found at the Edakkal cave, which is close to Sultan Battery. It's possible that the Bhagavathi temple on top of Edakkal cave was formerly a Jain institution. In 1959, a ruined ancient Jain temple with granite statues of Mahavira and Parswanatha was found in Kavassery Amsam, Alathur Taluk. Two ancient Jain *bastis* still serve the spiritual requirements of a few local Jain households in Bangra Manjeswaram in the Kasaragod taluk.

- ◆ Collapse- 8th century
- ◆ Naga worship-  
direct effect of  
Jainism
- ◆ Bhagavathi-  
Hindu religion  
from Jainism

Jainism in Kerala began to collapse in the 8th century CE, when the Saivite and Vishnavite movements had an influence, although it appears to have persisted until the 16th century CE, before nearly completely disappearing. Kerala culture has not been significantly influenced by Jainism over time. It is claimed to have impacted the design of Malabar's mosques and temples. William Logan has called particular attention to the fact that Jains-specific architecture has been used to construct Hindu temples and even Muslim mosques in Malabar. According to one theory, the prevalence of Naga or Snake worship in Kerala is a direct effect of Jainism. *Bhagavati* is said to have been incorporated into the Hindu pantheon from the Jain pantheon. There are still some older Jain families in the north Kerala communities of Wayanad and Kasaragod, and a few Gujarati business families who identify as Jains reside in commercial hubs like Alleppey and Mattancheri.

#### 2.4.3.1 Buddhist Settlements in Kerala

- ◆ 3rd century  
Buddhism  
arrived in Kerala

Buddhist settlements in Kerala have left behind significant historical evidence of their presence. Kerala experienced a flourishing Buddhist presence during the ancient times. The kings of the Chola, the Chera, and the Pandya nations reportedly established arrangements inside their respective nations for the care of people and animals suffering from illnesses, according to an Asokan inscription. It is also rumoured that some Buddhist missionaries travelled to

South India and spread Buddhist doctrines. It is likely that Buddhism arrived in Kerala around the third century CE. under the reign of Asoka. The *Manimekhalai* is primarily a Buddhist text and offers an in-depth study of Buddhist's core principles.

◆ *Palli Bana Perumal tradition*

Tradition claims that Palli Bana Perumal converted to Buddhism and gave up his kingdom. This custom is strongly related to the Hindu temples at Kilirur (Kottayam taluk) and Nilamperur (Kuttanad taluk). After abdicating, it is reported that Perumal travelled from his palace to Kilirur and then on to Nilamperur, where he spent his last days. There are several artefacts connected to this tradition.

◆ *Karumadikuttan-Alappuzha*

◆ *Sri Mulavasam-Buddhist pilgrimage centre*

It is said that several well-known Hindu temples from today, such the Kurumba Bhagavathi Temple in Cranganore and the Durga Temple in Paruvasseri, Thrissur, were once Buddhist sanctuaries. There were many Buddha statues seen in Karunagappally and Kunnathur. The Alleppey district's Mavelikara and Ambalapuzha taluks and the Quilon district's taluks both evince the predominance of the Buddhist faith in this region. The most renowned of these Buddhist statues is the Karumadi Kuttan, which is located close to Ambalapuzha. Sri Mulavasam was the most well-known Buddhist pilgrimage site in South India. The renowned Paliyam Copper Plate of the Ay king Vikramaditya Varaguna (885–925 CE.) offers testimony to the support the monarch gave the Sri Mulavasam temple. The inscription documents the monarch giving this temple a sizable piece of land in South Kerala. The invocation to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha that is found on the Paliyam Copper Plate shows how highly this emperor regarded and revered Buddhism. The Sanskrit text *Mushakavamsa* also makes mention of Sri Mulavasam.

◆ *Maritime trade-Kollam, Alappuzha, and Kodungallur*

◆ *Buddhist centres-Kottayam, Alappuzha, and Thrissur*

At Vanchi, there existed a Buddhist Chaitya that was well-known across South India. Excavations in various parts of Kerala have revealed the remnants of Buddhist stupas, indicating the existence of Buddhist monastic complexes. Sculptures of Buddha and Bodhisattvas have been discovered in Kerala, indicating the influence of Buddhism in the region. The sculptures display distinctive features and artistic styles, reflecting the cultural assimilation of Buddhist concepts. Archaeological evidence suggests the presence of Buddhist monastic sites in regions like Kottayam, Alappuzha, and Thrissur. These sites are believed to have served as centres of learning and meditation for Buddhist



monks. Buddhist settlements were primarily concentrated in coastal regions such as Kollam, Alappuzha, and Kodungallur. These areas served as important trading centres, allowing for cultural exchanges between Buddhist settlers and the local population. Buddhist merchants played a significant role in maritime trade, contributing to the economic growth of Kerala. Their interactions with local communities fostered the exchange of ideas, art forms, and philosophical concepts.

◆ *Influence on social and religious life of Kerala*

◆ *Kettukazhcha - - resemblance to Buddhist festival*

Even though Buddhism was disappeared from Kerala, its influence on Kerala society continues today. Actually, Hinduism merely incorporated some of Buddhism's magnificent rituals and modes of devotion. According to legend, Buddhism left behind the pictures, processions, utsavams, and other forms of public devotion seen in Kerala Hindu temples. The magnificent event known as *Kettukazhcha* or *Kutirakettu* connected to temple *utsavams* or festivals in Quilon and Alleppey regions deserves special note. The *Kettukazhcha* festival is said to have Buddhist influences since it is remarkably similar to the Buddhist celebration that the Chinese explorer Fahien saw in the city of Pataliputra in the fifth century CE.

◆ *Ayurvedic medical system- Buddhism*

The influence of Buddhism may also be found in other fields of work. The vast acceptance of the Ayurvedic medical system in Kerala is said to be a legacy of Buddhism. Numerous Buddhist monasteries established clinics where patients may get free healthcare. It is thought that the custom of providing medicinal preparations or oils to sick devotees who visit some Hindu temples, such as the Siva temple in Thiruvizha and the Sastha temple in Thakazhi, is a holdover from Buddhism's earlier influence in this region due to its concern for the sick and the suffering. The immense popularity of *Ashtangahridaya* written by Vagbhata, a Buddhist scholar, is also significant in this context.

Without a doubt, Buddhism made a significant contribution to the growth of education and literacy in Kerala. In the field of education, the monks of Buddhism were innovators. The Buddhist *Viharas* had schools or colleges that provided teaching, making them hubs for disseminating knowledge as well. Since the Buddhists used to refer to their *Viharas* as *Pallis*, it appears that the Malayalam title for the primary school, *Ezhuthupalli*, is a holdover from the time of Buddhism. Later educational centres started along with the temples. Buddhism has an impact on Kerala's literary and artistic growth as well. Buddhist influences may be seen in Kerala temples' aesthetic

- ◆ Educational centres within the temples as a influence of Buddhism
- ◆ Numerous works related to Buddhism

and architectural designs. Buddhist Scholar Amarasimha wrote the *Amarakosa*, which is well-known in Kerala. Kumaranasan's writings *Karuna*, *Chandala Bhikshuki*, and *Sri Buddha Charitam* may also be specifically addressed. As a result, Buddhism has had a significant and profound effect on Kerala's life and culture. The Buddhist religion began to decline from the 8th century CE, when it came to be subjected to the vigorous propaganda onslaughts of Hindu reformers like Sankaracharya and finally disappeared in the 12th century CE.

#### 2.4.3.2 The Jewish Settlements in Kerala

- ◆ Trade in spices and precious stones
- ◆ Established strong bond with local people

The Jewish settlements in Kerala hold a significant place in the history of the region. Here are more details about the Jewish community and their contributions. The Jewish community, known as the Cochin Jews or Malabar Jews, arrived on the Malabar Coast of Kerala during the 1st century CE. Historical accounts suggest that they came from various regions, including the Middle East and Spain. The Jewish settlers integrated into the local society, establishing strong bonds with the native population. They adopted aspects of the local culture while preserving their distinct Jewish identity. Jewish settlers actively engaged in trade, particularly in spices and precious stones, which were highly valued commodities in Kerala. They played a significant role in fostering trade relations between Kerala and the Middle East, contributing to the economic growth of the region. Jewish merchants established trade networks that connected Kerala with ports in the Middle East, facilitating the exchange of goods, ideas, and cultural influences.

- ◆ Enriched Culture of Kerala
- ◆ Synagogues in Mattancherry

The Jewish community built synagogues, places of worship and communal gatherings. The Paradesi Synagogue in Mattancherry in Kochi, is one of the oldest active synagogues in India. It stands as a symbol of the cultural exchange and the harmonious coexistence between the Jewish community and the local population. The Jews of Cochin maintained their unique customs and traditions while also adopting elements of the local culture. They developed a distinct dialect called "Judeo-Malayalam" and celebrated festivals that incorporated both Jewish and local customs. The Jewish settlements in Kerala highlight the cultural symbiosis that took place between the Jewish community and the local population. Their contributions to trade, cultural exchange, and religious practices enriched the multicultural fabric of Kerala. The synagogues and the unique customs of the



Jews of Cochin serve as lasting reminders of their historical presence and the harmonious coexistence with the people of Kerala.

#### 2.4.3.3 The Arab Settlements

- ◆ *Settlements in Calicut, Cochin and Cannanore*
- ◆ *Significant role in trade*
- ◆ *Spice trade*

The Arab settlements in Kerala have played a significant role in shaping the cultural and commercial landscape of the region. Kerala's geographical location along the Malabar Coast positioned it as an important hub for maritime trade between the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian subcontinent. Arab traders have been documented to have visited the region for trade purposes since ancient times. Arab merchants were particularly interested in Kerala's abundant spice resources, including pepper, cardamom, and cloves. They also engaged in the trade of textiles, such as cotton and silk, which were highly sought after commodities in both Arab and European markets. Arab traders established settlements and trading posts along the coastal areas of Kerala, such as Kozhikode (Calicut), Kochi (Cochin), and Kannur (Cannanore). These trading posts served as centres for commercial activities and cultural interactions between the Arab settlers and the local population. The interaction between Arab traders and the local communities resulted in a significant cultural exchange. Arabic influences can be observed in various aspects of Kerala's culture, including language, cuisine, and architectural styles.

- ◆ *Influenced Malayalam language*
- ◆ *New spices, cooking techniques, and culinary traditions*

The presence of Arab traders in Kerala influenced the Malayalam language, with Arabic loanwords and phrases incorporated into the vocabulary. These linguistic influences are still evident in the present-day Malayalam language. Arab traders introduced new spices, cooking techniques, and culinary traditions to Kerala. The use of ingredients like dates, nuts, and saffron in local dishes, as well as the preparation of dishes like biryani and falafel, showcase the culinary fusion resulting from the Arab settlement in Kerala. The Arab settlements in Kerala have left a lasting impact on the cultural, linguistic, and culinary aspects of the region. The trade relations and cultural exchanges between Arab traders and the local population have contributed to the multicultural identity of Kerala.

#### 2.4.4 Bhakti Traditions in Kerala- *Alvars* and *Nayanars*

While discussing Bhakthi tradition of Kerala, we have to recall Advaita philosopher Sankaracharya (788–820 CE.),

◆ *Sankaracharya*

under his leadership Hindu religious activities at the time experienced a significant boost. Sankara's life was not fully documented, although certain key moments are known. He was a *Nambuthiri Brahmin* who was born in Kaladi on the banks of Periyar river. Early in his life, Sankara emigrated from Kerala and made a pilgrimage to all of the major Hindu places in the country. During this journey, he met Govinda Yogi, a Gaudapada student, and recognised him as his spiritual leader. Then Sankara spread his Advaita Vedanta philosophy, which had its origins in Upanishad teachings. The central tenet of this philosophy was that Brahman, the all-pervading cosmic power, was the only thing that truly existed in this universe. Sankara considered all material things to be just illusions (Maya) and the human soul to be a component of this Brahman. He engaged in philosophical and academic debates with both Buddhist experts and the Mimamsakas. In the development of Hindu religion and culture, Sankara has a prominent place. It is also possible to claim that Sankara's philosophy is where Kerala's talent for blending cultures came to life. His thought combined the best aspects of Buddhism and Hinduism in an effort to bring about a rapprochement of opposing religions.

◆ *Alvars and Nayanars*

Bhakti traditions in Kerala refer to the devotional movements that emerged in the region, emphasising personal devotion and intense love for a particular deity. The *Alvars* and *Nayanars* were revered saints who played a significant role in the Bhakti traditions of Kerala.

#### ***2.4.4.1 Alvars***

◆ *Vaishnava saints- Alvars*

The *Alvars* were a group of twelve Vaishnava saints who lived between the 6th and 9th century CE. The *Alvars* claimed to have experienced direct divine visions and revelations, which inspired their poetic compositions. Their hymns were considered divinely inspired and were regarded as sacred scriptures in the Vaishnava tradition. The *Alvars'* hymns played a crucial role in popularizing the worship of Lord Vishnu and the practice of Bhakti among the masses. Their songs were sung in temples, recited in religious gatherings, and transmitted orally from generation to generation.

Sankara's contributions to the Hindu reformation had drawbacks. They explained Hinduism's beliefs in Sanskrit, making them difficult for an ordinary people to understand. They could, at most, only have an impact on the most literate members of the community; the general populace was unaffected. The saints who belonged to the Bhakti



◆ Drawbacks of Hinduism

school were successful in their mission to assimilate the latter into Hinduism. The Hindu reformers of the period came to believe that the persistence of Buddhism and Jainism among the populace prevented Hinduism from progressing in Kerala. In these conditions, the more inspired and learned Hindu followers attempted to eradicate the opposing sects by establishing and popularising a new religion of Bhakti, a deep emotional devotion to a personal God in the form of Vishnu or Shiva.

◆ Alvars and Nayanars

◆ Kulasekhara Alvar

The poet-devotees who propagated the new religion were free to traverse the countryside while singing devotional songs (Bhajans) that they had written from the inspiration of their own deep religious experience. These lyrics, written in simple Tamil, addressed the average person's deepest emotions. These hymns sparked interest in Hinduism by giving the well-known deities Siva and Vishnu vibrant personalities of their own. Many of people were unhappy as a result of the Hindu saints of the time challenging the representatives of other creeds to public debates and discussions about the supremacy of their teachings. Thus, a wave of religious fervour swept the length and width of the nation, and it didn't take long for Jainism and Buddhism to fade away and Hinduism to solidify its position as the dominant religion in the lives of the great majority of people.

◆ Kulasekhara Alvar

The *Alvars* and the *Nayanars* respectively led the Saivite and Vaishnavite branches of the Bhakti movement in South India. Two of the sixty-three *Nayanars* and one of the twelve Alvars were from Kerala. Kulasekhara Alvar, the creator of the Second Chera Empire, was the Alvar who belonged to Kerala. He is regarded as one of South India's greatest religious figures. He sang various devotional songs glorifying Vishnu in the forms of Rama and Krishna. He was a profound Sanskrit and Tamil scholar. The magnificent literary manifestation of the Bhakti cult may be found in Kulasekhara Alvar's *Mukundamala* in Sanskrit and *Perumal Tirumozhi* in Tamil. The *Perumal Tirumozhi* consists of 105 verses which form part of the Vaishnavite *Divyaprabandham*. His teachings and poems had a significant impact on the growth of Vaishnavism in Kerala.

#### 2.4.4.2 Nayanars

The *Nayanars* were a group of sixty-three Saivaite saints who lived between the 6th and 9th centuries CE. The *Nayanars* were known for their intense devotion and their profound spiritual experiences with Lord Shiva. Their songs conveyed

◆ *Nayanars- Saivaite saints*

◆ *Thevarams- devotional songs*

their personal experiences and the deep bond they felt with the divine. The *Thevarams* were written in Tamil, contributing to the preservation and enrichment of the Tamil language. The *Nayanars'* compositions served as a significant literary and spiritual contribution to Tamil literature.

◆ *Cheraman Perumal Nayanar*

Rajasekhara Varman (820–844 CE.), the second in a long line of rulers who governed the Kulasekhara Empire, has been linked to Cheraman Perumal Nayanar, one of the *Nayanars* from Kerala. In his *Periyapuranam*, Sekkilar tells the tale of Cheraman Perumal Nayanar. He is said to have spent his formative years at Tiruvanchikulam before assuming the kingdom after his father abdicated and became ascetic. The famous Saiva saint Sundaramurthi Nayanar, who together with Appar and Sambandar has sung the Saivite devotional hymns known as *Tevaram*, at Tiruvarur. Together, Cheraman Perumal and Sundaramurthi Nayanar travelled to all of South India's significant Saivite sanctuaries.

◆ *Viralminda Nayanar*

The other notable Saiva saint from Kerala was Viralminda Nayanar. His caste as a Vellala and thus a Sudra makes this amazing detail about his life stand out. He was a contemporary of Sundaramurthi and Cheraman Perumal Nayanar and was instrumental in spreading the Saivite worship in Kerala. He considered the followers of Siva to be more deserving of his respect than Siva himself.

## Summarised Overview

Trade corporations played an important role in Kerala's economy throughout the Middle Ages. *Anchuvannam*, *Manigramam*, *Valanchiyar*, and *Nanadesikal*, the trading conglomerates, reshaping the economic environment and promoting trade and commerce of medieval Kerala. Five major merchant groups or guilds that operated in various parts of Kerala made up the *Anchuvannam* guild. *Anchuvannam's* guilds were involved in a variety of business ventures, including the spice trade, textile production, metal working, and banking. In particular, they contributed significantly to the export of spices like pepper, cardamom, and cinnamon in Kerala's thriving trading networks. *Manigramam* concentrated mostly on banking and lending activities. *Manigramam's* members were skilled at handling finances, investments, and financial dealings. A group of merchants or traders with expertise in particular goods or sectors is referred to as a *valanchiyar*. They were renowned for their trading prowess, particularly with regard to niche products like spices, textiles, or precious metals. The term *Nanadesikal* represents



traders who specialised in long-distance commerce and had strong ties to far-off places. Merchants from *Nanadesikal* engaged in international commerce and built relationships with merchants from other regions of India and other countries.

In Kerala, Terisappalli and the Jewish Copper Plates are of utmost historical significance. The Jewish Copper Plates show evidence of Jewish colonies and reflect the cultural variety and religious tolerance that characterised Kerala during ancient and mediaeval times, whereas Terisappalli represents the early presence of Christianity and its absorption into the region. Jainism, Buddhism, Jews and Arab settlements had enriched the cultural history of Kerala.

The Bhakti cult, which had prominent exponents in the 9th century in Kulasekhara Alvar, Cheraman Perumal Nayanar, and Viralminda Nayanar, insured that Hinduism would continue to consolidate its prior gains. The *Ponvannattandadi*, one of Cheraman Perumal Nayanar's literary works, is renowned for its melodic allure and exquisite craftsmanship. The *Alvars* and *Nayanars* served as bridge builders between the world of the common people and the realm of the gods. They gave people a way to communicate with the divine and feel a strong sense of oneness and spiritual connection via their compositions. The hymns and melodies of the *Alvars* and *Nayanars* overcame language, social, and religious boundaries to draw admirers from all walks of life. Their creations fostered a sense of inclusivity and togetherness among people by bringing them together in their common commitment to the divine.

## Self Assessment

1. Name two prominent trade corporations that existed in medieval Kerala.
2. What is the significance of Terisappalli in the context of Kerala's history?
3. Name two religious groups that had settlements in Kerala and contributed to its cultural symbiosis.
4. Identify the two major saints associated with the Bhakti traditions in Kerala.
5. What do you know about *Kettukazhcha*?
6. What do you know about *Nanadesikal*?
7. What do you know about *Anchuvannam* and *Manigramam*?
8. What is the significance of *Sreemulavasam* in the Buddhist history?
9. Differentiate *Alvars* and *Nayanars*.
10. Name the Arab settlements in Kerala.



## Assignments

1. Discuss the role of trade corporations on the economy and society of medieval Kerala.
2. Evaluate the historical significance of Terisappalli and Jewish copper plates in Kerala.
3. Discuss the cultural symbiosis in Kerala resulting from the settlements of Jewish, and Arab communities.
4. Explore the Bhakti traditions in Kerala and their impact on religious and cultural practices.
5. Bring out the impact of Buddhism and Jainism in Kerala society.

## Suggested Readings

1. Raghava Varier and Rajan Gurukkal, *Kerala Charithram*, Vol.I. and II, Current Books, Kottayam, 2004.
2. Raghava Varier and Rajan Gurukkal, *Cultural History of Kerala*, Cultural Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999.
3. Raghava Varier, *Keraliyatha Charithra Manangal*, Current Books, Kottayam, 1990.
4. Rajan Gurukkal, *Social Formation in Early South India*, OUP, Delhi, 2010.
5. Rajan Gurukkal, 'From Clan and Lineage to Hereditary Occupation to Caste', in Deve Nathan (ed.), *From Tribe to Caste*, Shimla, 1997.

## References

1. A P Ibrahim Kunju, *Studies in Medieval Kerala History*, Kerala Historical Society Thiruvananthapuram, 1975.
2. Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahmin Settlements in Kerala*, Thrissur, 2013.
3. Kesavan Veluthat, *The Early Medieval in South India*, New Delhi, 2008.
4. K N Ganesh, *Reflections on Pre-Modern Kerala*, Cosmo Books, Thrissur, 2016.
5. M. G .S Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, Current Books Thrissur. 2018.



## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

# Towards Fragmented Social System

**BLOCK-03**



# Historiography and Sources

## Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ learn the current academic understandings about the polity and feudal society of the pre-modern Kerala
- ◆ enhance critical thinking towards the multiple views of historians concerning the medieval Kerala society
- ◆ make an academic sense of historiographical and empirical data on the proposed period

## Background

Historiography examines how history is portrayed. This unit focuses on the different sources used to reconstruct the history of medieval Kerala. Scholars contributed to historical studies and research in Kerala through their writings. The pre-modern era saw a significant production of historical works. Numerous source materials are available for studying medieval Kerala, with historical works from that period shedding light on its socio-economic, political, and cultural aspects.

## Keywords

*Granthavari* traditions, *Manipravalam* Literatures, Travel accounts, Arab, Chinese and European, colonial records, Archaeological sources, architectural remains, coins, epigraphs



## Discussion

### 3.1.1 Historical Studies on Medieval Kerala

- ◆ A variety of sources were deployed to re-construct medieval history of Kerala

To reconstruct Kerala's medieval period, a variety of source materials, including archaeological and literary sources, must be consulted. Dr. Gundert's *Kerala Pazhama* is an important historical work that covers the Portuguese occupation of Kerala from 1498 to 1531. Several other works also deserve mention, such as Pachu Muthatu's *Tiruvitamkoor Charitram*, K.P. Padmanabha Menon's *The Kochi Rajya Charithram*, Puthezhath Raman Menon's *Saktan Tampuran*, S. Sanku Ayyar's *Kerala Charitrathile Chila Ajnata Bhagangal* and *Keralavum Buddhamatavum*, P.K. Gopalakrishnan's *Keralathinte Samskarika Charitram*, and P.A. Syed Muhammad's *Kerala Muslim Charitam*. The writings of Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai revolutionized historical studies in Kerala by approaching inscriptions and available sources in a scientific manner, providing insights into the history of Kerala from the Sangam age to the Portuguese period. Manuals and Gazetteers, such as *The Malabar Manual*, *The Malabar and the Dutch and History of Kerala (1498-1801)* by K.M. Panikkar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, *A History of Kerala* by K.V. Krishna Ayyar, and *Medieval Kerala* by P.K.S. Raja, made significant contributions to historical study and research in Kerala.

- ◆ Role of Sanskrit works in having a better understanding of Kerala history

The great Sanskrit work on grammar and rhetoric, *Lilathilakam*, written between 1385 and 1400 CE, is of remarkable historical significance. It mentions Chera Udaya Marthanda Varma, who ruled Venad from 1383 to 1444 CE, as well as Ravi Varma, the *yuvaraja* at that time, and his defeat at the hands of the Pandyas. Uddanda Sastrikal's *Kokilasandesha* is another important work that refers to pilgrimage centers in North Kerala, such as Thirunelli, Taliparamba, Trichambaram, Triprangode, and Thirunavaya. It also mentions the flourishing trade under the Zamorin and the *Mamamkam* festival held at Tirunavai on the banks of the river Bharathapuzha. The works *Mayuraduta* by Udaya and *Subhagasandesha* by Narayana describes about the geography of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Additionally, the *Vyavahara Mala* contains a code of civil and criminal laws.

Among the earliest Malayalam works, the *Unniachicharitam* and *Unnichirutevicharitam*, written in the latter half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE, provides a detailed description about *Devadasis*



- ◆ Contributions of Malayalam works on Devadasis to Kerala History

and shed light on some aspects of North Kerala's political and social life during that time. In the *Anantapuravarnana*, written in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, there are detailed descriptions of Thiruvananthapuram and *Kanthallur Salai*, as well as glimpses of local traditions and customs. *Unnunistandesam* highlights the achievements of Venad rulers Iravi Iravi Varman (1350-1376) and Aditya Varma's *Sarvanganatha* (1376-1383), providing valuable information about the political geography of the region from Trivandrum to Kaduthuruthi. References to the local kingdoms of Venad, Odanad, Tekkumkur, and Vadakkumkur enrich our historical knowledge.

- ◆ Early history of Perumpadappu Swarupam

The *Unniaticharitam*, written towards the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, provides insights into the early history of the Perumpadappu Swarupam and its connections to the Odanad kingdom. The *Kokasandesam*, written around 1400 CE, offers insightful historical data. Its mention of the swan passing through Kunaka (Trikanam matilakam), Vanchi, and Tiruvanchikulam (Tiruanchikalam) before arriving at Thiruvanchikulam provides important evidence that Vanchimutur was the capital of the first Chera Empire.

### 3.1.2 Granthavari Traditions

- ◆ Relevance of Granthavaris

There is a common practice of recording transaction details and deeds in *Olakkaranam*, which refers to palm-leaf records. Prominent households began maintaining their own archives in the form of daily accounts known as '*nalvali*', which often included mentions of events and occasions. Temples also kept *granthavaris*, which were descriptive accounts primarily used as references for political and agrarian administration. Even during British rule, the practice of creating *granthavaris* continued in Kerala. These *granthavaris* provided information about contemporary political events and the recent past, occasionally attempting to recount historical events while establishing a connection to current political developments.

- ◆ Granthavari officially recorded the land transfer and financial accounts

The Sri Padmanabha temple's *kshetrtakaryam curuna* and *Rajyakaryam curuna* documents both were - related with temple events and external political developments. *Granthavaris* are useful when studying Kerala's history during the medieval era. Examples of *granthavaris* from the medieval period include *Vanneri Granthavari*, *Kutali Granthavari*, the Guruvayur temple records, and *Kavalappara* records. Other important *granthavaris* of this genre being the are *Mathilakam Granthavari* and the *Grathavaris* of the Zamorins of Calicut. However, *granthavaris* need to be used with caution as they

were compiled by panegyrists employed by rulers, which may include elements of exaggeration.

### 3.1.3 Manipravalam Literatures

Kerala witnessed a new literary trend between the 9th and 12th centuries, which involved the combination of Sanskrit and Tamil languages. This combination, known as *Manipravalam*, literally means *Gem and Coral* and represents a mixture of the two languages. *Manipravalam* was primarily used for writing poetry starting from the 11th century. It is believed that Tholan, the author of *Attaprakaram* and *Kramadeepika*, was likely the first contributor to Manipravalam poetry. The first and most important text from this tradition is *Vaishika Tantra*, which was compiled following the rules of literary discourse. The text revolves around a mother giving advice to her child on the doctrine of the prostitute. *Payyannur Pattola* and *Yathrakaliyile Naalupaatham* are songs that made significant literary contributions to the *Manipravalam* tradition. In the 12th century, the earliest version of the Malayalam translation of *Arthasastra* was produced in Kerala, providing evidence of the usage of the Malayalam language during early medieval times. Another notable work from this period is *Ramacharitham*, which focuses on the *yudhakandam* (war chapter) of the *Ramayana*. *Lilathilakam*, written in the 14th century, is a work on grammar and rhetoric that emphasizes the adherence to Sanskrit prosody rules in *Manipravalam* poetry.

- ◆ Mixture of Tamil and Sanskrit works

### 3.1.4 Travel Accounts

#### Arab

Arab travellers and geographers from the 9th century made significant contributions to the study of medieval Kerala. One such merchant, Sulaiman al-Tajir, wrote about this land during the 9th century. It is believed that he may have visited Kerala in 851 CE and provided descriptions of the then existing socio-economic situation. However, some scholars suggest that he did not have direct experience with Kerala and based his descriptions on secondary sources. According to his accounts, Kollam was the prominent and busiest port in South India, where Chinese ships would stop on their return from Persia. Khurdadbeh's descriptions (844-848 CE) provide details about the Malabar coast and the export of rice from Bahattan (Valapattanam) to Ceylon (Sarandweep). His account also mentions the ports and towns of Kerala. It is believed that scholars like Ibn al-Fakki

- ◆ Early accounts of Arab travellers and geographers on Kerala



(902 CE), Abu Sayd (915 CE), and Al-Masudi (945-955 CE) wrote about Kerala in 10<sup>th</sup> century.

- ◆ *Ibn Battuta's account on quality of pepper, details of its trade, presence of Chinese ships in Kollam and Calicut ports*

Most of these writers relied on the descriptions provided by Sulaiman Al-Tajir. Arab scholars such as Al-Idrisi (1154 CE) and Yaqut (1189-1229 CE) mentions Kerala's coastal cities and the way of life of the local people during the twelfth century. Rashidudeen, in his travel records between 1247 and 1281, described the socio-political situations of Kolathunadu in Northern Kerala. During the 14th century, Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan traveller (1342-1347 CE), visited Kerala and provided detailed information about various aspects of the region. He explained about the political and trading networks that existed in the Indian Ocean and Kerala. He also discussed about spiritual and religious institutions, the social customs of different communities, and the economic conditions of various port towns. Ibn Battuta's descriptions included the quality of pepper, details of its trade, and the presence of Chinese ships in Kollam and Calicut ports. He also highlighted the internal diversity of Muslim merchant communities across the different port cities along the Kerala coast. Unlike other Arab records before fifteenth century, Ibn Battuta's accounts hold great significance in Kerala historiography as they are based on his personal experiences and observations.

## Chinese

- ◆ *Ma Huan's descriptions on Port town of medieval Calicut and Cochin*

Chinese records from the 7<sup>th</sup> century onwards provide information about South India, particularly Kerala. Wang Taivan, a Chinese trader, travelled in between 1330-1349 CE and wrote the *Tao-i-Chilio* (Description of the Barbarians of the Isles). In his work, he mentions about Kayamkulam, Ezhimala, and Kozhikode. Wang Taivan's account is based on his firsthand experience and serves as a valuable primary source for constructing the history of early medieval Kerala. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Chinese Muslim traveller Ma Huan wrote about Calicut and Cochin, which can be considered as are significant historical sources pertaining to this period. These places were cosmopolitan cities where merchants from different parts of the world came for trade. Ma Huan provides interesting descriptions of the port and town of medieval Calicut. He was the first foreign writer to offer a clear picture of Cochin, mentioning the king, people, and city based on his direct experience. These records are crucial for gaining a broader perspective on the history of pre-modern Kerala.

## European-Colonial Records

- ◆ *European Accounts on Kerala*

In the twelfth century, Rabbi Benjamin (1159-1173 CE), a Jewish traveller from Spain, published his travelogue on the East, which provides interesting information about Kollam. However, it is likely that his descriptions are based on secondary information rather than firsthand experience.

- ◆ *Friar Jordance mentions about Christian merchants in Kollam who were engaged in spice trade*

In the thirteenth century, Marco Polo, the Venetian traveller, visited Kerala and wrote a detailed account. He explored major port towns in Kerala, including Kollam, giving vivid descriptions about local people, forests, villages, and economic activities. His observations on the Ezhimala kingdom offer an early account of this dynasty. In 1322 CE, Friar Odoric of Pordenone visited Kollam during his journey to China. He documented the emerging trade networks along the Kerala coast by specifically mentioning the presence of Jewish merchants in Kollam. In 1324 CE, Friar Jordance arrived in Kollam and was appointed for missionary activities within the St. Thomas Christian community in that region. His *Mirabilia Descriptia* recorded the prosperity of Christian merchants in Kollam and the surrounding area who were involved in the spice trade at the Kollam port. He devoted considerable attention for describing about the quality of tolerance inherent in the Kerala rulers, who embraced various religious traditions in their kingdom. He also mentioned the skilled healers and experts in medicine in Kerala, as well as the influence of astrologers in forecasting the future and their impact on society. Friar Jordance was likely the first foreign author to write about the *marumakkathayam* system of Kerala.

- ◆ *Accounts of John de Marignoll*

In 1347 CE, John de Marignolli from Florence arrived in Kollam while on his way to China. He stayed in Kollam for about a year and was appointed as the priest of St. George Church. His descriptions could contribute to the reconstruction of the history of religious and trade networks across the oceans in the mid-14th century. During 1440-41, Niccolo Conti, an Italian traveller, visited Cochin and Kollam. His detailed accounts of the spice trade, including pepper, ginger, and cardamom, provide valuable insights for historiography. His description of Cochin port is one of the earliest accounts by a European traveller. From the 15th century onwards, there was an increase in the number of texts written by European travellers. This indicates a deliberate European focus on acquiring knowledge about the Indian Ocean region, particularly in Kerala. In other



words, the European ambition to explore new territories in Asia may have been influenced by this acquired knowledge.

- ◆ *Athanasius Nikitin's accounts on Calicut*  
Before the arrival of the Portuguese in Kerala, Athanasius Nikitin (1468-74 C.E.) visited the port of Calicut and provided a detailed description of daily activities in the market. Another traveller, Hieronimo Di Santo Stefano, arrived in Calicut in the 15th century and commented on the city and its trading activities. He mentioned the customs of various communities residing in Calicut and its surrounding area.
- ◆ *Ludovico de Varthema and his accounts on Calicut mentions about its people, customs and administration*  
Prior to the arrival of Portuguese navigators, Pero da Covilha, a Portuguese envoy, arrived in Calicut. He was proficient in multiple languages and documented the significant role of Muslim merchant communities in the pepper trade. During the Portuguese intervention in Kerala, numerous records were available in European languages. Between 1502 and 1508, the Italian scholar Ludovico de Varthema extensively travelled across the port town of Calicut, documenting people, customs, and administration. His descriptions provide insights into the social history of Kerala.
- ◆ *Accounts of Duarte Barbosa and Ralph Fitch*  
In 1500 CE, Duarte Barbosa embarked on an adventure across different regions of Kerala, dedicating around 16 years to learning local languages, including Malayalam, and documenting information about ports, religions, trading affairs, merchant communities, and political discourse in Kerala. In 1583, Master Ralph Fitch, an Englishman, arrived in Cochin and spent a few months there. He also travelled through Kollam and Calicut, where he observed the thriving pepper trade.
- ◆ *Pyrard de Laval mentions judicial system practiced in Calicut port city*  
In 1607, the French traveller, Pyrard de Laval visited Calicut and described various spiritual activities and different modes of trading affairs. He specifically mentioned the crime and punishment system practiced in the port city. He praised the judicial system followed by the Zamorin rulers of Calicut, particularly at the port town. His descriptions serve as primary evidence for reconstructing the socio-political history of pre-modern Kerala.
- ◆ *Dutch accounts on political, social and economic history of Kerala*  
Most Dutch administrators documented their accounts and administrative practices regarding the Dutch interventions in Kerala. These rich sources provide valuable information for understanding Dutch political, social, and economic history. Dutch administrative officers, such as Moens, Van Reed, and Gollennesse, wrote memorials that detailed the contemporary

situation in Kerala. Dr. John Frier visited Cochin and Kozhikode between 1670 and 1681 and described the social atmosphere of 17th-century Kerala, making comparisons with other Indian cities.

- ◆ *British accounts on administrative, political and economic affairs*

During the British administration, a wide variety of documents were produced about Kerala. From 1725 to 1751, the English East India Company and the Zamorin of Calicut held several meetings and consultations. These records, known as the Tellicherry Consultation, documented administrative, political, and economic affairs in 18th-century Kerala. They also mentioned the relationship between Dutch administrators and the Zamorins. The Mysore invasions before 1756 were well-documented in these accounts. In 1783, the report of the joint commissioners documented the early years of British expansion into Kerala and related incidents.

- ◆ *Accounts of Francis Buchanan and Francis Day on Kerala*

The journey of Francis Buchanan (1800-1801) across different regions of Kerala was recorded and surveyed the history, social life, administrative measures, and economic conditions of the people in Kerala. Colonial authors, such as Francis Day with his work *The Land of Perumals* and Samuel Mateer with *Land of Charity and Native Life in Travancore*, wrote valuable records for the historiography of Kerala.

### 3.1.5 Archaeological Sources

#### Architectural Remains – Coins- Epigraphs

- ◆ *Architectural remnants of medieval Kerala*

Temples, churches, mosques, palaces, and forts, as well as stone images and historical sites, provide insights into the medieval history of Kerala. The churches in Kerala showcase a blend of native and foreign architectural styles. Mural paintings in the Orthodox Syrian Church in Mulanthuruthy, dating back to around 1225 CE, depict biblical events.

- ◆ *Coins- excavated from different sites*

Inscriptions and literary evidence provide proof of the various types of coins that were used in pre-modern Kerala society. Archaeological excavations conducted at various sites, such as port towns, markets, and trade routes, have identified different coins from the ancient period, including Roman coins. Coins have played a significant role in facilitating exchange and production processes in economies since ancient times. Silver coins with punch marks and gold coins of Roman origin have been found in different kingdoms of Kerala, indicating the widespread use of coin-based transactions.



◆ Introduction of Chola gold coin

The ancient kingdom of Kerala witnessed the circulation of coins from the Chola, Chera, and Pandya dynasties. In 1200 CE, the Chola gold coin known as *Anaiachu* was introduced. The *Tulukkakasu*, a coin used by the Madurai Sultanate, came into use in the latter half of the 14th century. According to W. Elliot, the coins known as '*Kaliyugarajan*' or '*Kaliyugarayan Panam*' were prevalent throughout Kerala. Alongside these imported coins, a variety of indigenous coins such as *kashu*, *dinaram*, and *pazhangashu* were found in South India until the 10th century CE. Inscriptions from the 12th century mention coins like *achu*, *pana*, and *śalakam*, which were used for regional economic transactions. Specific coins like *anaiachu* were used solely for market transactions, while *azhakachu* was preferred for temple offerings. Other coins such as *kambi*, *tharam*, *thiramam*, *panam*, and *pakam* were commonly used in the medieval markets of Kerala. These coins were typically made of low-quality metals and were limited to regional kingdoms.

◆ Inscriptions as valuable sources of information

Important inscriptions, such as the Manalikara inscription of Ravi Kerala Varma (1215-1240 CE), the Kandiur inscription of 1218, Ravi Varma Kulasekhara's inscription (1299-1314 CE), and the Trikkannammkudi Bell inscription of Aditya Varma (1469-1484 CE), have aided in reconstructing the history of the medieval period. The Kandiur inscription of 1218 mentions Ravi Kerala Varma, who ruled Venad from 1215 onwards, as well as the renovation of the Kandiur temple by the Oadanad king Kotha Varma at the request of the Venad king. An inscription of Ravi Varma Kulasekhara (1299-1314 CE) is found in the Siva temple at Salaigramam in Trivandrum. It provides details about Ravi Varma's titles and is written in Grantha characters, with the last six lines in Tamil. Additionally, inscriptions of Ravi Varma discovered in Tamil Nadu, specifically from Kanchipuram, Tiruvati, Srirangam, and Poonamallee, shed light on his conquests and achievements.

◆ Trikkannammkudi Bell inscription

Grantha characters were used in a significant Sanskrit inscription of Aditya Varma Sarvanganatha (1376-1383) of Venad. This inscription was discovered in the Krishnaswami shrine of the Sri Padmanabhaswamy temple in Trivandrum and describes the king's restoration of the shrine. Another important document is Aditya Varma's (1469-1484) Trikkannammkudi Bell inscription. Records from Bhutala Vira Udaya Marthanda Varma (1516-1535 CE.) found in the Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari areas demonstrate his concern for various religious groups, including Jains and Christians.

The Syrian Christian Copper Plate from 1225 CE, issued by Vira Raghava Chakravarti, a ruler of Perumpadappu Swarupam, from his headquarters at Mahodayapuram, is a significant historical document in Kerala's epigraphy.

◆ *Tiruvalla Copper Plates*

A Malayalam inscription from the Tiruvanchikulam Siva temple, dated 976 Kollam era (1801), describes Saktan Tampuran's (1790–1805) restoration of the temple, which was previously destroyed by Sastrabahya, identified with Tipu Sultan. Some temple records also provide important information about Medieval Kerala. The extensive Thiruvalla Copper Plates, considered a document from the 12th century CE, mention various institutions and customs prevalent in Kerala society.

◆ *Vadakkunathan temple inscriptions*

The Vadakkunnatha temple in Trichur contains three inscriptions that are generally dated to the 12th century CE. These inscriptions refer to the *Kottuvayiraveli Kacham*, which signifies the dominance of Namboothiri Brahmins in drafting laws governing the rights of tenants, servants, and others subject to the Vadakkunnathan temple, making them historically significant. This *Kacham* is unique in Kerala as it includes provisions for controlling the rights of tenants.

◆ *Pattazhi Copper plate*

The Pattazhi Copper plate, dated Kollam era 971 (1796 CE), obtained from the Bhagavathi temple at Pattazhi in the Kottarakkara taluk, relates to the *Prayaschitta* or expiation in the form of a monetary fine of one hundred *Rasis*. This inscription sheds light on the interactions between the *Uralar* and the *Karalar* in the 18th century regarding temple administration concerns.

◆ *Muchundi mosque inscription*

A remarkable stone inscription has been found in the Muchundi mosque in Kuttichira, Kozhikode. This inscription, dating back to the 13th century, is written in both Malayalam and Arab languages and is partially in the *Vattezhuthu* script. The inscription holds historical significance as it records the permanent grant of property by the Zamorin of Calicut to a mosque in his capital.

◆ *Chendamangalam Synagogue document*

An ancient Hebrew document from the Chendamangalam Synagogue, dating back to 1269 CE, has also been discovered. At the Parur Synagogue, a Hebrew inscription was found, which indicates that the synagogue was built in the year 5376 Anno Mundi (1615 CE).



## Summarised Overview

The reconstruction of Kerala's history is a challenging task due to the abundance of source materials available for studying medieval Kerala. Historical works from that period shed light on the socio-economic, political, and cultural aspects of life in medieval Kerala, depicting ruling dynasties and rulers. Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai's writings brought a scientific approach to historical works, based on the study of epigraphical evidence and other resources, thus expanding the dimensions of historical study. Literary works such as *Sandeshakavyas*, *Lilathilakam*, *Anantapuravarnana*, and *Unniaticharitam* provide insights into the geography, polity, and society of medieval Kerala.

*Grandhavaris*, which are cadjan leaf documents or chronicles, played a significant role in the early history of several kingdoms in Kerala, including Travancore and Cochin. They contain descriptions of land revenue settlements, financial accounts, temple events during *pujas* and festivals, and business transactions conducted by *yogams* or temple councils. Additionally, they mention grants and donations made to temples by the royal family. These manuscripts are essential for understanding Kerala's socio-economic, political, cultural, and religious life. *Manipravalam* works also contribute to our understanding of social life in medieval Kerala, with many featuring *Devadasis* as heroines. They depict the leisurely lifestyle of the privileged class and provide insights into the devadasi system and *sambandham* system prevalent in Kerala society.

Accounts of Arab and Chinese travellers further contribute to the study of medieval Kerala. They describe trade and commercial relations, exports and imports, and the ports of Kerala, particularly Kollam and Calicut. Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan traveller, provides a detailed picture of the landscape and explains the political and trading networks of the Indian Ocean and Kerala. The Chinese traveller Mahuan offers a comprehensive account of the ports and towns of medieval Calicut, becoming the first foreigner to provide a clear picture of Cochin.

European travellers also offer valuable insights into the life of medieval Kerala, particularly regarding ports and maritime commercial relations. Rabbi Benjamin, Marco Polo, Friar Odoric, John de Marignolli, and Niccolo Conti provide interesting descriptions of Kollam. Friar Jordance mentions experts in medicine and highlights the influence of astrologers in society. He also refers to the *Marumakkathayam* system. Athansius Nikitin, Hieronimo di Santo Stefano, and Pero da Covilha describe the daily affairs of the Calicut port and the local customs of different communities in the port's vicinity.

Portuguese travellers provide accounts of crimes, punishment, and the judicial system under the Zamorin in Calicut. Duarte Barbosa, for example, embarked on an adventure across different regions of Kerala and learned

local languages, including Malayalam. They describe the thriving pepper trade in Calicut and Kollam. Dutch administrators like Van Rheed wrote memoirs detailing contemporary Kerala, while British administrative reports and inquiry reports serve as valuable sources of information about British administration in Kerala and their relationship with the land, people, and rulers.

Temples, churches, mosques, palaces, and forts offer a glimpse into the cultural life of medieval Kerala. Coinage also plays a crucial role in reconstructing Kerala's past, as the dates, symbols, and legends on coins provide valuable insights to historians. Kerala has utilized a wide variety of coins, both native and imported, since ancient times. Inscriptions serve as reliable sources of knowledge about Kerala's early history, providing important information for reconstructing dynastic histories and shedding light on people's political, social, and cultural lives in various eras. Through the study of these sources, we can trace the pre-modern age of Kerala.

## Self Assessment

1. Name the important works of *Manippravalam* literature.
2. What do you know about *Granthavaris*?
3. Who is the author of '*Kerala Pazhama*'?
4. What do you know about '*Kokila Sandesha*'?
5. Name the important *Granthavaris* of the medieval period?
6. Name the Moroccan traveller who visited Kerala in 1343.
7. Name the two important works of Samuel Mateer.
8. What is '*Anaiachu*'?
9. What do you know about the Kandiur inscription?
10. Mention *Mathilakam Granthavari*.

## Assignments

1. Discuss the importance of *Granthavaris* in writing the medieval history of Kerala.
2. Name the important *Manippravalam* literature and mention how they helped to study the social life of medieval Kerala.



3. Discuss how the writings of foreign travellers help us to reconstruct the maritime history of medieval Kerala.
4. Explain the importance of colonial administrative reports for the study of Kerala.
5. Write a short note on Arab travel accounts.

## Suggested Readings

1. K.P Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol.IV, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 2003.
2. Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahmin Settlements in Kerala*, Sandhya Publications, Calicut, 1978.
3. M.R. Raghava Varier, *Medieval Kerala: Economy, Society and Culture*, Chinta Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, 1993.
4. P.K.S. Raja, *Medieval Kerala*, Navakerala Publishing House, Calicut, 1966.

## References

1. A.Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2007.
2. K.K.Kusuman(ed.) *Issues in Kerala Historiography*, ICKS, Thiruvananthapuram, 2003.
3. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier, *History of Kerala : Prehistoric to the Present*, Orient Blackswan, 2018.
4. T.K.Gangadharan, *History of Kerala*, Calicut University.

## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.





# Fragmented Medieval Polity

## Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ♦ familiarize themselves with post-Perumal polity
- ♦ analyse the formation of *swarupams*
- ♦ examine the rise and growth of major *Swarupams* like Venad, Nediyruppu and Perumpadappu *swarupams*

## Background

In the previous unit, we analyzed medieval historical sources to gain insights into the political and social landscape of the post-Perumal age. This unit focuses on the era of *Swarupams*, which emerged following the disintegration of the Perumal dynasty. With the disappearance of the Perumal from Mahodayapuram, their nominal suzerainty over the chiefdom vanished, and local rulers from their respective original families, known as *Swarupams*, took control. The prominent *Swarupams* included Venad, Nediyruppu, and Perumpadappu *Swarupam*. We also provide a detailed analysis of these major *Swarupams* in this unit.

## Keywords

*Swarupam*, Perumal, Venad, Nediyruppu, Perumpadappu, *desam*, *Naduvazhi*, *Mamamkam*, *Revathipattathanam*, *Smarthavicharam*



## Discussion

### 3.2.1 Post-Perumal Polity and the Formation of *Swarupam*

- ◆ Differences of opinion about the formation of *Nadus*

Agrarian expansion, economic growth, social differentiation, and trade in a region are closely related to the development and consolidation of political power. These changes played a significant role in the emergence of independent principalities in the 13th century CE. As the authority of the central power weakened, fissiparous tendencies arose, prompting the *naduvazhis* to assert their independence. This process, where economic growth necessitated the autonomy and power of localities, is referred to as *nadus*.

- ◆ Opinions of Elamkulam and M.G.S. Narayanan on 'Hundred Years War'

Elamkulam presented the conflict between the Cheras and Cholas as a 'hundred years war,' but M.G.S. Narayanan rejected this view by demonstrating that there were several years of peace between invasions led by different Chola kings, starting from Paranthaka. Invasions occurred frequently between 998-1018 CE, resulting in Chola hegemony over the Perumal from 1018-1066. There were few invasions until the end of Perumal rule in 1122 CE when Ramavarma Kulasekhara abdicated the throne.

- ◆ Emergence of *Naduvazhi* system in Kerala

During the post-Perumal period, centralised political power and structures declined. The *Naduvazhi* system emerged in Kerala after the decline of the Perumal. Local rulers gained power and controlled regional territories, leading to the decline of influential institutions such as *Muzhikulam Kachams*, which were prominent during the Perumal rule. In post-Perumal inscriptions and records, there were rare mentions of *Kachams* and their contemporary practices. Similarly, influential trade guilds like *Anjuvannam* and *Manigramam* declined during this period, despite their significant role in trade across the South and the Indian Ocean during the Perumal era.

- ◆ *Nadus* becoming independent ruling entities

Significant changes occurred in the political structure, particularly in the nature of *Nadus*, which became more independent in due course of time. *Nadus* such as Venad, Eranad, Valluvanad, and Kurumbranadus became independent ruling institutions during this period, potentially contributing to the emergence of *Swarupams* in the post-Perumal era. The newly emerged *naduvazhis*



and their families gained power and came to be known as *Swarupams*.

### 3.2.2 *Swarupams*

- ◆ *Swarupams were associated with political, economic and territorial aspects*

The concept and meaning of *Swarupams* varied across different periods and locations. Technically, the term refers to a specific form of rule over a particular site, territory, or boundaries. In pre-modern Kerala, *Swarupams* were closely connected to the political, economic, and territorial aspects of that era. The *Swarupam* period can be roughly estimated to have existed between 1100 and 1800 CE. Interestingly, the term *Swarupam* does not appear in the inscriptions of the Perumal period.

- ◆ *Swarupams exercised power through nadus*

Simply put, *Swarupams* can be defined as ruling families that had control over the *Nadus*. They followed a joint family system and resided in *Kovilakams*. Their political authority was organized based on *Kuroalcha*, which involved a gradation of rights and privileges within the ruling houses, with *Muttakur* (seniority) determining the right to power. This practice is known as *Muppumura*. These political institutions patronized various temples and Brahmins. The development of temple-centered political power in Kerala can be predominantly traced back to this circumstance. Different *Nadus* and their *Swarupams* patronized these temples to legitimize their authority and power, which also contributed to the legitimization of Brahmanical power in Kerala. Rituals for establishing and affirming the rulers' authority were commonly observed during these occasions. For example, the Zamorins of Calicut practiced the ritual called *Ariyittuvazhcha*, while the Travancore kingdom followed the *Hiranyagarbha* ritual.

- ◆ *Prominent nadus: Venad, Perumpadappu, Nediyiruppu and Valluvanad*

*Swarupams* held absolute power to rule the nadus. Prominent *Swarupams* in Kerala between the twelfth and eighteenth centuries included Venad (Thrissappur), Perumpadappu (Cochin), Nediyiruppu (Kozhikode), Kollam (Kolathunadus), Valluvanad (Arangottu), and others. The handling of multiple Naduvazhis and ruling families resulted in the loss of a centralized political administration in Kerala. This, in turn, led to the development of the *Jenmi* system and the emergence of the priestly class in Kerala.

#### 3.2.2.1 *Swarupam of Venad*

Venad ranked highest among the principalities in terms of wealth, resourcefulness, and its long history. It gained political

- ◆ *Royal family of Venad resided in different places with different names*

prominence in the 12th century CE after the Kulasekharas disappeared as the ruling power in Kerala. P. Shungoonny Menon mentions some of the supposed rulers of Venad in his History of Travancore. He also suggests that during this extended period, the royal family resided in different places and had five different names, including Venad, Tiruvitamkode, Trippappur, Chiravai, and Desinganad Swarupams.

- ◆ *Kizhperur served as the headquarters of Venad*

Kizhperur, near Kilimanoor, served as the headquarters of the ruling house of Venad. Over time, a branch settled in Tripapur near Thiruvananthapuram, which developed into a significant trading center. Venad possessed a vast expanse of agricultural lands, constituting the primary resource for the ruling family. Income from landowners, trade taxes, tolls on trade routes, and customary payments formed the main source of revenue. Within two centuries, the king's family branched into three lineages: Thrrippapur, Chirava, and Desinganadus. According to tradition, the eldest male in these three families became the ruler of Venad.

- ◆ *First ruler of the independent Venad was Ramavarma Kulasekhara*

After the decline of the Perumal kingdom, Venad began ruling independently like other nadus. Ramavarma Kulasekhara was regarded as the first king of independent Venad. They used the title Kulasekhara to establish their lineage from the Perumals of Mahodayapuram and legitimize their independent political power. Some information about a few kings is available, such as Vira Kerala Varma, Vira Ravi Varma, and Maravarman Sri Vallabha. Vira Ravi Varma's successor, Adithya Varma (1165-1175 CE), is mentioned for his military campaigns in *Unnineelisandesham* and other literary works. Udaya Marthanda Varma (1175-1195 CE), Virarama Kerala Varma (1205-1215 CE), Ravi Kerala Varma (1215-1240 CE), Padmanabha Marthanda Varma (1240-1253 CE), and Ravi Varma Kulasekhara (1299-1314 CE) are other rulers mentioned in various inscriptions. The Kandiur inscription states that at least eight nadus north of Venad were under the influence of the King of Venad.

It is worth noting that Venad began ruling independently, similar to other nadus, after the decline of the Perumal kingdom. Ramavarma Kulasekhara was considered the first king of independent Venad. They adopted the title Kulasekhara to signify their direct lineage from the Perumals of Mahodayapuram, aiming to legitimize their independent political authority. Some information about a few kings is available, such as Vira Kerala Varma, Vira Ravi Varma, and

- ◆ Title 'Kulasekharah' lineal descent from Perumals of Kulasekhara

Maravarman Sri Vallabha. Adithya Varma (1165-1175 CE), the successor of Vira Ravi Varma, is mentioned for his military expeditions in *Unnineelilandesham* and various literary works. Other rulers mentioned in different inscriptions include Udaya Marthanda Varma (1175-1195 CE), Virarama Kerala Varma (1205-1215 CE), Ravi Kerala Varma (1215-1240 CE), Padmanabha Marthanda Varma (1240-1253 CE), and Ravi Varma Kulasekhara (1299-1314 CE). The Kandiur inscription refers to at least eight *Nadus* north of Venad being under the influence of the King of Venad.

- ◆ Pandya invasion during the reign of Kotha Marthanda Varma

There was political instability in the 13th century when the Pandya dynasty gained supremacy in the southern part of Venad. Reliable historical records for this period are lacking. Kotha Marthanda Varma (1251-1299) was the ruler of Venad during Sundara Pandya's invasion. He was succeeded by Ravi Varma Kulasekhara (1299-1314), who became the first Venad ruler to follow a matrilineal system of succession. Ravi Varma Kulasekhara was an efficient ruler, and the 1300 Srirangam inscriptions describe him as a protector of Vedas.

- ◆ Padmanabhapuram inscription

The successor of Ravi Varma Kulasekhara was Sri Vira Udaya Marthanda Varma (1313-1345), followed by Vira Kerala Varma. Towards the end of the 14th century, Venadu was ruled by the brothers Iravi Varma and Iravi Aticca Varma. The Padmanabhapuram inscription of 1402 CE mentions Vira Kerala Marthanda Varma as the next known king of Venad, along with his twin brother Chera Udaya Marthanda (1383-1444 CE). The invasion by the Vijayanagara kingdom resulted in the restoration of the southern part of Venad. However, the kingdom faced unrest again due to subsequent invasions.

- ◆ Vijayanagara invasion and Venad rulers

During the Vijayanagara invasion, Sree Vira Udaya Marthanda (1516-1535 CE) was the king of Venad. The evidence regarding his successor is unknown, but a king named Sree Veera Kerala Varma seems to have ruled between 1544 and 1545. Rama Varma succeeded him, although the date of his reign's end is not known. Unnikkerala Varma (1544-1594 CE) is said to have succeeded Rama Varma, followed by Udaya Marthanda Varma, who died in 1595. Vira Ravi Varma ascended the throne after him.

There is a lack of reliable information regarding the chronology of the Venad kings. It remains unclear whether these monarchs were fully independent or merely subordinate to the Pandya kings. Ma Huan's mention of the Venadus king's currency, consisting of gold pieces weighing one *fen*

◆ *Vagueness in the chronology of Venad rulers*

(5.75 grains) each, confirms their right to mint coins, which is a significant symbol of a king's authority.

◆ *Trade guilds*

The political, social, and economic conditions of early Venad are described in the accounts of foreign travellers and contemporary inscriptions. Initially, the throne was ascended through a patrilineal system of succession, later transitioning to a matrilineal one. The king wielded extensive and diverse powers, but their authority was limited by popular assemblies called *Kuttams*. *Desams* were established to facilitate governance within the kingdom. The state had various sources of revenue, including sales tax, professional taxes, customs duties, and property taxes. Merchant guilds such as *Anchuvannam* and *Manigramam* played a significant role in the early development of commercial towns like Quilon. However, their influence seemed to decline and eventually disappear in the 12th century.

◆ *Patronage of Hinduism and other religions by Venad rulers*

The rulers of Venad were patrons of Hinduism and placed special emphasis on the maintenance and restoration of temples. Temples were associated with Vedic schools and colleges. In addition to Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam also thrived in the region. Foreign travellers like Marco Polo visited Quilon during this period and mentioned about Jewish and Christian communities in Kollam. The dominance of higher castes and the *Namboothiri Jenmis* in social life during that time was another noteworthy aspect of the period.

◆ *Venad as a prosperous centre of pepper trade*

Quilon, the capital of Venad, was a magnificent city provided with all facilities of civilized life. Accounts of the foreign travellers and Malayalam literature like *Unniachi Charitam* and *Unnunilandesam* attested the brisk trade carried on through the Quilon port. During Sulaiman's visit (851 CE) Quilon was the most considerable port in South India at the time and it was the only port in India touched by huge Chinese junks on their homeward voyage from Persia. Benjamin of Tudela who visited Quilon praised the integrity of the King's officers who supervised the commercial transaction at Quilon port. Pepper, cinnamon and ginger were the main items of exports from Quilon port. Marco Polo, who visited Quilon in the late 13th, mentioned about the prosperous pepper trade in Quilon especially with China. The early Venad kingdom thus benefited from liberal governance, social advancement, and material wealth under its enlightened rulers.



### 3.2.2.2 Nediyruppu Swarupam

- ◆ Calicut emerging as a dominant power in northern and central Kerala

Kozhikode was a dominant power in northern and central Kerala during the Middle Ages. Similar to other nadus, Eranad gained independence after the decline of the Perumal rule. According to *Keralolpathi*, Eranad expanded its territory by annexing the regions of Polanadu and Valluvanad. The chieftains of Eranad from Nediyruppu defeated the Vellathiris of Valluvanad and the Polathiris of Polanadu in the north-west. This allowed the Eratis to control the lucrative spice trade in Kozhikode and Pantalayani Kollam, as well as oversee the supply of hill products for trade.

- ◆ Main revenue of Nediyruppu Swarupam came from spice and salt trade

The main source of revenue for the Nediyruppu *swarupam* came from the spice and salt trade. Other sources of revenue included *Ankam* (dues for duels), *Cunkam* (tolls), *ela* (fee for unclaimed cattle), *kozha* (service charge), *vazhi* (route tax), *pizha* (fine), and *cangata mukham nokku* (periodical gifts). The Mamamkam festival, held once every twelve years in the month of Thulam, held great economic significance as a major fair attracting merchants from afar.

- ◆ Kaval changatams maintained internal peace and security

The Kingdom of Calicut came to be known as Nediyruppu, with the Zamorin as its ruler. The *Nediyruppu* chronicles mention the contingent of warriors mobilized by the Eratis, such as *Patinjattumuri lokar* and *Vadakumpuram lokar*. Additionally, there were guards known as *kaval changatam* responsible for maintaining internal peace and security. The Nediyruppu rulers sought to attain Kshatriya status through the ritual attribution of the sword, dagger and rapier as royal insignia to the warrior leaders. Rituals were performed to make these services customary and obligatory, and warrior leaders were granted hereditary status.

- ◆ Kozhikode *granthavaris* mentions about coins minted in 1667

Coins were minted by the rulers of the Nediyruppu *swarupam*. The Kozhikode *granthavaris* provides details of the coins minted in 1667. Coins were minted at the *kammattam* under royal direction and distributed according to prescribed norms based on tradition and hereditary rights. Trade flourished under the Zamorin's rule, with extensive Chinese and Arab trade of pepper and other spices in the port of Kozhikode. The Zamorin's helpful attitude towards foreign traders, along with his reputation as a tolerant and fair-minded ruler, attracted a large number of foreign traders to Kozhikode, eventually establishing it a primary trading hub in the Malabar region.

The Zamorin governed Calicut based on liberal principles.

- ◆ A hierarchical order of governance with liberal principles existed in Calicut

He was required to abide by local customary law and heed the advice of his ministers. Four chief ministers, known as *Sarvadhikaryakar*, along with a group of smaller ministers, known as *Karyakkar*, assisted the Zamorin in his duties. The most senior chief minister, Mangat Achan, held a special role in the royal government. The second most important position was held by the Dharmoth Panikkar, the Zamorin's hereditary instructor-in-arms and officer-in-charge of the royal gymnasium, known as *Kalari*. Each district, or *nadus*, within the Zamorin's kingdom was governed by a hereditary governor, or *Naduvazhi*. In addition to paying the Zamorin's *Purushantaram*, or succession fee, the *Naduvazhi* offered gifts on occasions such as *Onam*, *Vishu*, *Mamankam*, and *Ariyittuvazhcha* (the Zamorin's coronation). During times of war, they also provided the Zamorin with well-trained soldiers.

- ◆ Administrative and military apparatus maintained by Zamorin of Calicut

To carry out regular administrative tasks, an elaborate civil service was developed. Taxes were collected by the *Karyakkar*, and accounts were submitted to the king by the palace accountants, known as *Menokkis*. They were responsible for maintaining accounts and records as well. The capital city had governors and customs officers. The Zamorin maintained an efficient military apparatus. Nair youths received training in the use of weapons, such as swords, shields, bows and arrows, and lances, in each *Desam's* gymnasium, or *Kalari*. Once a young man successfully completed the *Kalari* training course, he would appear before the *Naduvazhi* to pay the customary *Nuzzar* and receive a sword, symbolizing his official membership in the local militia. He could be enlisted for active duty whenever the chief desired. Standing armies in cities like Calicut were commanded by officers known as *Talachennors*.

- ◆ Tinyancheri Elayath was the Head of Ordnance department

The Zamorin had an ordnance department led by Tinyancheri Elayath, also known as *Vetikurukkal*, and a cavalry force under Kutiravattathu Nair. Kunjali Marakkars served as admirals of the Zamorin's navy. While the king was the ultimate source of justice, his officers and knowledgeable Brahmins trained in the *Sastras* supported him in his judicial duties on exceptional occasions. Plaintiffs were not charged any fees, and justice was provided to all free of charge. Property disputes were resolved by ad hoc bodies called Panchayats.

However, criminal justice was handled in an outdated manner. Cases involving violations against morality and



- ◆ *Brahmins were free from all sorts of penalties*

religion were addressed by caste tribunals. Consequently, the caste tribunal examined allegations of adultery against *Nambuthiri* women, known as *Smartavicharam*. Ex-communication was imposed upon those proven guilty. Serious crimes such as murder, dacoity, robbery, treason, etc. were dealt with death penalty. Even for minor offenses, whipping, flogging, and mutilation were frequently employed as punishments. It is worth noting that Brahmins were exempt from such penalties.

- ◆ *Mamamkam took place as a grand economic fair on the banks of river Bharathappuzha*

*Mamamkam* was a significant economic fair on the Thirunavaya bank of the river Bharathapuzha, where merchants from distant locations gathered to trade goods. The Zamorin captured Thirunavaya from the Chief of the Vellathiri and incorporated it into the kingdom of Venad due to the economic importance of *Mamamkam*. Subsequently, the Valluvanad chiefs dispatched warriors as *chaver* (suicide squads) to assassinate the Zamorin, who presided over the fair. As a result, the fair turned into a bloodbath, with warriors attempting to behead the Zamorin while he sat on the special platform (*Nilapatu thara*). The last recorded *Mamamkam* took place in 1755 and concluded with the invasion of Kozhikode by Hyder Ali, the Sultan of Mysore.

- ◆ *Revati Pattathanam was a literary assembly held at Tali temple*

The Zamorin made significant contributions to the development of arts and literature. Zamorin Manavikrama wrote the *Vikramiya*, a commentary on Murari's *Anargharaghava*. Eighteen renowned royal poets, known as *Patinettarakavikal*, adorned his court, with the most notable among them being Uddanda Sastrikal. Other notable poets included the two Payyur Bhattatiris (Maharshi and his son Parameswara), Damodara Bhattatiri of Kakkasseri, Narayanan Namboothiri of Chennas, and Punam Namboothiri. *Revati Pattathanam*, a literary assembly, commenced its deliberations on the day of the *Revati* asterism in the month of *Tulam* (October-November). The Assembly was held at the Tali temple in Calicut and was attended by scholars and poets from different parts of Kerala and beyond. Distinguished scholars who participated in the Assembly were awarded the title *Bhatta*. The *Revathy Pattathanam* elevated the Zamorin's status in the cultural field, while *Mamamkam* helped him secure a unique position in the political arena.

### 3.2.2.3 Perumpadappu Swarupam

After the decline of the Kulasekhara dynasty, Perumpadappu *Swarupam* emerged as an independent principality. There are different opinions regarding the origin

◆ Rule of Perumpadappu Swarupam

of Perumpadappu *Swarupam*. According to the traditional view, the ruler of Perumpadappu *Swarupam* descended from the Kulasekharas of Mahodayapuram through the maternal line. Until the late 13th century, the Perumpadappu *Swarupam* had its headquarters at Chitrakutam in the village of Perumpadappu in Vanneri. However, the ruler had his own palace in Mahodayapuram. When the Zamorin conquered Valluvanad in the latter half of the 13th century, the rulers of Perumpadappu *Swarupam* abandoned the palace in Vanneri and permanently migrated to Mahodayapuram until 1405. Due to the aggressive advances of the Zamorin, the chief of Perumpadappu *Swarupam* relocated his capital to Cochin, which was beyond the immediate reach of Zamorin's conquests. With the flooding of Periyar in 1314, Kannur lost its prominence in commerce, and the port of Cochin gained prominence.

◆ Major functionalities of Perumpadappu Swarupam

Literary works and inscriptions provide information about the rulers of Perumpadappu *Swarupam*. A grant was given to Iravi Kortanan by Vira Raghava Chakravarti from *Perumkovilakam* in *Makotair Pattanam* (Mahodayapuram), who seems to have been a king of Perumpadappu. Literary works such as *Sukasandesam*, *Unniati Charitam*, *Sivavilasam*, and *Vitanidrabhanam*, composed in the 14th century, offer interesting insights into the early history of the Swarupam. The chief of the *Swarupam* is even referred to as Kerala *Chakravarti* in *Sivavilasam* and other works. The chief of Perumpadappu served as *Koviladhikarikal* and had authority over a large number of temples, regardless of political boundaries. His exercise of moral and religious authority compensated for his lack of political influence and stature. In reality, Cochin was once a small kingdom, and its ruler held limited power over Cochin and the surrounding regions, including Tiruvanchikulam.

From the 15th century onwards there was a prolonged struggle between Zamorin and Cochin Raja for the political supremacy of central Kerala. The internal dissensions in Cochin helped Zamorin in his aggressive designs. By this time, the Perumpadappu family had divided into five branches, or *tavazhis*, known as *Mutha*, *Elaya*, *Palluruthi*, *Madathungal* or *Muringur*, and *Chazhur*. Each of these branches had its own domains, militia, and family seat. The eldest male member of these five families ascended the throne of Cochin. There was also a custom that prevailed in Cochin that reigning Raja must abdicate the throne in favour of the *Elaya Raja* and to go into religious seclusion in his old



- ◆ Long struggle between Zamorin and Cochin Raja



age. This made the internal conflict in the *Swarupam* even more acute because there were always two factions in the kingdom, one following *Perumpadappu Muppil*, the ruler who abdicated, and the other the reigning Raja.

## Summarised Overview

Age of *Swarupam* and *Naduvazhis* began with the disintegration of the Perumals of Mahodayapuram. When the Perumal disappeared from Mahodayapuram, the nominal suzerainty he enjoyed over the chiefdoms also disappeared with him. Thereafter localised rulers of different nadus ruled from their original families called *Swarupam*. *Swarupam* represents the form through which power is exercised through nadus. Genesis of these elite families is vague, but the tradition goes that they received power from Perumals. Major *Swarupam* of this time period were Venad, Nediyruppu and Perumpadappu *Swarupam*.

Joint family system was common for all *Swarupam* and followed the Matriliney and *marumakkathayam* system. Ravi Varma Kulasekhara was the first ruler who succeeded through the matrilineal system in Venad. Seniority was the major criterion for becoming the ruler of *Swarupam*. *Ariyittuvazcha* is the ceremony of coronation through which the chiefs of Nediyruppu *Swarupam* and Cochin became ruler and Venad followed *Hiranyagarbha*. This practice is called assuming *mooppu* i.e. eldership. Institutions of proper management of resources, execution of administration and institutions with juridical powers emerged with the *Swarupam*. The *Jenmi* system also developed during this period.

In Venad the ruler had vast powers, but this was limited by the popular Assemblies called *Kuttams*. Sales tax, professional taxes, customs and levies, and property taxes were the main sources of revenue. The trade guilds like *Anchuvannam* and *Manigramam* declined during the 12th century. Foreign travellers mention about the flourishing trade in Quilon where pepper, cinnamon and ginger were the main items of exports from Quilon port.

The chief of Eranad had his residence in Nediyruppu. He emerged later as Zamorin of Calicut when he got control over Calicut port where trade had flourished. The landlocked character of Nediyruppu was broken with the emergence of Zamorin. The main source of revenue was from spice and salt trade. The *Mamankam* festival attracted merchants from different parts of Kerala and outside Kerala. There were warriors for maintaining internal peace and order. Coins were minted at the *Kammatam* under the supervision of Zamorin. *Sarvadhikaryakar* and *Karyakkar* were there to assist the ruler in administration. The kingdom was divided into *nadus* was under the control of governor. Military training was given to the Nair youths in *kalaris*. Zamorin patronized arts and literature. *Revathi Pattathanam*, a literary assembly used to commence in Thali



temple where scholars and poets participated in it. This helped Zamorin to attain high status in the cultural field.

Perumpadappu swarupam became an independent principality after the decline of Perumals. Literature and inscriptions were the main sources for the study of Perumpadappu *swarupam*. Chitrakutam was the early capital of Perumpadappu swarupam, but later they moved to Mahodayapuram, then to Cochin because of the aggressive invasion of the Zamorin. Perumpadappu chief served as *Koviladhikarikal* and he controlled a number of temples. He exercises moral and religious authority rather than political influence.

Thus the emergence of independent principalities after the fall of Kulasekhara led to a change in political and social life of Kerala. It saw the emergence of the *Jenmi* system and *Marumakkathayam* system. The entire administrative system underwent a radical change. All these led to the fragmentation of land and policy in due course of time.

## Self Assessment

1. Define *Swarupam*.
2. Name the major *Swarupams* in the medieval period.
3. What do you know about the *Marumakkathayam* system?
4. What is the significance of *Mamamkam*?
5. Who was *sarvadhikaryakkar*?
6. Define *Hiranyagarbha* and *Ariyittuvazhcha*.
7. What is *Revathi Pattathanam*?
8. Explain *Smarthavicharam*.
9. Name the literary works helped for the reconstruction of the history of Cochin.
10. What was *Kurvalcha*?



## Assignments

1. Write a short note on the formation of *Swarupams*.
2. *Swarupams* were the real power centres of medieval Kerala. Elucidate.
3. Discuss the administrative system that existed in Venad *Swarupam*.
4. The *Revathy Pattathanam* helped the Zamorin high status in the cultural field and *Mamankam* helped him to win a unique position in the political field. Explain.
5. Write a short note on Perumpadappu *Swarupam*.

## Suggested Readings

1. K.P Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol.IV, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 2003.
2. Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahmin Settlements in Kerala*, Sandhya Publications, Calicut, 1978.
3. M.R. Raghava Varier, *Medieval Kerala: Economy, Society and Culture*, Chinta Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, 1993.
4. P.K.S. Raja, *Medieval Kerala*, Navakerala Publishing House, Calicut, 1966.

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1. A.Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2007.
2. T.K.Gangadharan, *History of Kerala*, Calicut University.
3. K.K.Kusuman(ed.), *Issues in Kerala Historiography*, ICKS, Thiruvananthapuram, 2003.
4. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier, *History of Kerala : Prehistoric to the Present*, Orient Blackswan, 2020.



## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.





## Production and Exchange in the Medieval Period

### Learning Outcomes

On completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ♦ illustrate the land relations in Medieval Kerala
- ♦ know the important trading centres in Kerala during the medieval period
- ♦ examine the trade relation with Chinese and Arabs
- ♦ analyse the local and long distance trade in medieval Kerala

### Background

In the preceding unit, we observed the interconnectedness and uninterrupted nature of both agrarian expansion and trade. By the 12th century, the *Brahmins* had emerged as the most influential dominant group. Through their involvement in religious leadership and temple administration, the *Brahmins* gained prominence as influential landowners, gradually transitioning from managerial authority to ownership rights. Kings and governors also possessed significant landholdings. Local and long-distance trade thrived during this era, with extensive trading activities occurring between Kerala, particularly the Malabar Coast, the Arab and Chinese regions. This unit provides a detailed examination of medieval trade, centers, and groups.

### Keywords

*Pattam, Kudiyan Al, Kizhmaryada, Desamaryada, Trade centres, Arab, Chinese, Calicut*



## Discussion

### 3.3.1 Fragmentation of Polity and Land

- ◆ Nature of agrarian settlements

The settlement pattern in Kerala's agrarian villages was influenced by the region's unique ecology and geographical characteristics. The expansion of agriculture is well-documented in the literary compositions of the time. *Manipravalam* texts mention several new agricultural settlements in the Brahmana village within the *Perumpadappu Swarupam*. *Unnineelisamdesam* and *Sukasandesam* indicate that the southern parts of Venpolinadu were covered by forests. Foreign travellers like Friar Odoric of Pordenone observed extensive forests to the north of Panthalayani Kollam. The region was dotted with agrarian settlements dating back to the Perumal period, featuring home gardens containing coconut and areca nut palms, with jackfruit and mango trees scattered throughout the place. These settlements played a significant role in facilitating the expansion of Kerala's agrarian civilization.

- ◆ Ma Huan mentions about exchange of goods in market

The *Musakavamsa Kavya* mentions vast paddy fields and highland cultivation tracts in northern Kerala. *Keralolpathi* refers to the extensive agriculture of Polanadu, which served as the resource base for Zamorin's trade. Literary works also depict the *puncha* fields (summer crop of paddy) in Valluvanad of southern Malabar. Chinese traveller Ma Huan, in his work *Ying-yai-Shenglan*, notes the exchange of rice, millets, lentils, and pulses in the market.

- ◆ Al were the bounded labourers attached to the agricultural land

The process of agricultural production saw little change immediately after the disappearance of the Perumals in 1124 CE. Bonded labourers known as *Al* provided the necessary agricultural labour for both food and cash crops. Epigraphical evidence shows that these labourers were tied to the agricultural land, and when land transactions occurred, the labourers were also transferred along with the land. The labourers constituted the main source of agricultural labour, but they had no rights over the products they cultivated or the land itself. In addition to basic necessities like food and clothing, grains and vegetables were provided to the *Al*. This group included *pulayas*, *parayas*, *Kanamkkas*, *Ezhavas*, and *channars*.

The labourers cultivated food and cash crops either for the landowners or for the tenants known as *kutiyan*. *Kutiyan*,



- ◆ Landed property of temples were managed by Brahmins

who leased land from the landowners and were obligated to provide a portion of the produce, referred to as *melvaram*, *meloti*, or *pattam*, to the landowners. If the land was owned by a temple, the leaseholder was required to remit dues for rituals and other temple expenses. The landed property of the temple was managed by *Brahmins*, some of whom leased temple land and served as caretakers. In return for their services, temple functionaries such as priests, secretaries, drummers, garland makers, and sweepers were given leased land known as *viruthi*. Occupational groups like oil mongers (*jimiya*) and potters (*kalavaniyan*), who settled on temple land, also had to provide provisions to the temple.

- ◆ Sanketham possessed independent sovereign authority

During this period, the properties of temples and Brahmins often became *sanketams*. Almost all significant temples in Kerala had their own *sanketams*. *Sanketams* came in two forms: those established by *Brahmin* landlords and those founded by rulers as a sign of their devotion to gods and Brahmins. Both types were governed by *Brahmin* landowners, and the ruling sovereign had no control over them. Many *sanketams* were governed by an assembly called *Yogam*. The protection of *sanketam* property was entrusted to local warrior groups known as *nattukuttam*, which varied in strength, similar to the *arunuttuvar* of Venad. In the 14th century, these groups were replaced by *arisippatijanam*, *akampatijanam*, and *cangatam*. They received *rakshabhogam* or *kavalpanam* (protection fee) as a share of the produce for their services. Some inscriptions from Thiruvitamkur mentioned *manusyam* contingents, which included territorial warriors, employees, and temple officials. The ruling houses and local chiefs also owned land. Each head of the ruling family received a portion of the produce from the cultivators, in addition to their share of rent from the *Cherikkal* property (crown's property). The royal share was known as *komuraipatu*.

- ◆ Emergence of intermediaries

With the emergence of new intermediaries, the agrarian order and economic ties became more complex. Old regulations like *Kachams* were replaced by new local customs, precedents, and precedence known as *desamaryada*, *keezhmaryada*, and *kiliyakkam*. The leaseholder pays a lump sum of cash, called *artham*, to the landowners as a security deposit to cultivate their land. Landlords receive a share of the produce after deducting the interest on the *artham* amount. This period witnessed the rise of intermediaries.

From the 12th to the 15th centuries, land relations in Kerala underwent important changes, such as the increase

- ◆ *Kuzhikkanam referred to the rights of lease holder over crops*

of intermediaries as temporary landholders and the use of money in transactions. An important development in the land system was the intermediaries' rights to lease land, known as *Kuzhikanam*. *Kuzhikanam* referred to the rights over long-yielding crops, such as coconut and arecanut trees, planted by the leaseholders. These changes occurred within the framework of customary law or *Keezhmaryada*, which maintained the old dependencies, service obligations, and the basic structure of agrarian relations without significant alterations. The expansion of agrarian settlements and population growth facilitated the expansion of trade relations.

### 3.3.2 Medieval Trade Centers and Trade Groups - Inland and Coastal Centres, Indigenous and Foreign Groups

- ◆ *Use of money for profit oriented transaction developed*

Traditional barter exchange persisted as regular and seasonal fairs. People from all sections participated in these local exchanges. Commonly traded items included rice, paddy, millets, vegetables, plantains, coconut oil, and fish. Over time, the use of money for profit-oriented transactions began to develop. The book '*Unnichirutevicharitham*' mentions *Ayanachira* as a local commercial center in the Valluvanad region, and the flourishing market at Kariyanadus near Thiruvalla is mentioned in the *Unnineelisandesham*.

- ◆ *Trade groups*

Even in villages, this form of exchange is distinguished as trade and it co-existed with other forms of exchange. The town of Ayanarcira is referred to as a commercial hub in the Valluvantu region in *Unnichirutevicharitam*. The bustling market in Kariyantu, close to Tiruvalla, is referred in *Unnunilisandeam*. A vast network of overland and international trade already included a regular demand for spices and other Kerala items with a long history of exchange. A number of the merchant organisations mentioned in the epigraphs from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, including *anchuvannam*, *manigramam*, *nandesikal*, *narpattennayiravar*, *patinenbhumi*, *tisai ayirattu ainnurruvar*, and *valanchiyar*, continued to operate across the political boundaries of the different south Indian regions. Some sort of diversification in trading activities due to specialisation in trade has been noted as an important development in the contemporary south Indian trades. In the Kollur Matham plates, distinct categories of *vaniya* (oil merchants) and *kalavaniya* (pot merchants) are noted.

◆ *Brahmins involved in trade relations*

There is epigraphical evidence of trade relations in medieval Kerala. The merchant group called *Manigramam* and its leader Iravi Korttan, who had a trade monopoly in Kotunkolur, are mentioned in the grant of Vira Raghava (1225 CE). Brahmins were also actively involved in trade between Tamil Nadu and Kerala. They brought rice, cotton, and silk to Kerala and traded them for a large quantity of pepper. Inscriptions and literary works also refer to horse trading. Chola inscriptions mention horse dealers called *kuthiraccettis* from Malainadus. *Unniyachicharitham* also mentions the lucrative horse trade in Kerala. Persian historian Wassaf al-Hadrat (1299-1323) states that the price of each horse was fixed at 220 dinars worth of gold.

◆ *Trade relations*

Merchants from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Konkan, Andhra, Kalinga (Orissa), Malava (Ujjain), and Vengra (Bengal) came to Kerala for trade. Trade relations between Kerala and other regions beyond the Western Ghats and Vindhya region depended on sea routes as well as land routes.

◆ *Geographical location facilitating trade activities*

The geographical location of Kerala facilitated maritime trade with the South China Sea, the eastern Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, and connections to Persia, Arabia, East Africa, and the Mediterranean. The favorable oceanic environment made the Kerala Coast the longest voyaging route in the Indian Ocean World. Different sailing seasons led to the development of separate trading circuits, and the coastal location gave Kerala a strong orientation towards the sea.

◆ *Terisapally Copper Plate*

There existed a belief system among the higher castes that discouraged maritime activities and the flow of capital into the agrarian sector. These factors created an environment where Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Hindus from other regions could control maritime activities along the Kerala Coast. The Terisapally Copper Plate of 849 CE, issued by a local ruler to the Christian community in Kollam, contains signatures in Pahlavi, Hebrew, and Kufic Arab, indicating the influential role played by Jews, Christians, and Muslim traders in this port city. This inscription is one of the earliest indigenous pieces of evidence of the presence of Muslim traders on the Kerala Coast.

According to Geneza records (Judeo-Arab documents from the 11th and 12th centuries that deal with trade and commerce in the Indian Ocean World and beyond), it is evident that Muslims dominated the sea trade between Aden and the Kerala Coast under the Ayyubid (1173-1229 CE) and

- ◆ Sources related to pepper trade in Kerala

Rasulid (1229-1454 CE) dynasties. They strengthened the commercial links with the Indian Ocean world. The *Geneza* records provide detailed freight charges for transporting goods between the Kerala Coast and Aden from the mid-12th century. The main exports from Kerala were pepper, cardamom, ginger, metals (copper, iron, and steel), and sundries. Other exported goods included hardwoods, areca betel nuts, textiles and various other products. Pepper from Kerala was specifically highlighted as being of great importance in medieval sources. In addition to exports, Kerala imported textiles, metallic vessels, ornaments, household goods, chemicals (especially arsenic) and raw materials for the copper industry, coral, rice from the Coromandel Coast, horses and frankincense from Arabia and Persia, delicate spices (cloves, nutmeg, and mace) from Southeast Asia, ceramics, silks, and other textiles from China. The exchange of pepper from the Kerala Coast for gold was not conducted through barter. The *Geneza* records indicate the flow of Egyptian and Yemeni mithqals and dinars to the Kerala Coast.

- ◆ Marco Polo- Kerala sea trade was controlled by Muslims and Chinese merchants

Marco Polo (C. 1290 CE) noted that Muslim and Chinese merchants controlled Kerala's sea trade. Ibn Battuta's accounts also recorded the dominance of Muslims in Kerala's pepper trade in the mid-14th century and their administrative roles in major ports. Chinese sources from the same period confirm the active participation of Muslim traders from the Kerala Coast in trading affairs in Southeast Asia and China. By the end of the 15th century, three main groups controlled the sea trade of the Kerala Coast: the *Chettis* of Coromandel, the *Vanias* (or *Banias*) of Gujarat, and the Muslims. The *Chettis* dominated trade in the Bay of Bengal, the *Vanias* were prominent in India's western seaboard, and the Muslims controlled the western routes leading to the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, and East Africa. "Portuguese account of the 16<sup>th</sup> century states that 'all the merchants in Kerala who trade on the sea were Moors, and they have the whole trade'."

### 3.3.2.1 Trade Centres

#### Kodungallur

It is believed that the ancient port of Muziris (Pattanam) in Kerala was situated at the mouth of the Periyar River, near the present-day town of Kodungallur (Cranganore). Excavations at this site have revealed numerous ancient Graeco-Roman artefacts, hoards, coins, and ceramics from



- ◆ *Graeco-Roman artefacts were excavated from Kodungallur*

West Asia. During the reigns of the Abbasid, Fatimid, and Ayyubid dynasties, trade with Cairo, Aden, and the Kerala Coast grew in significance. These developments also had an impact on the history of Kodungallur, where Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities settled. The Cheraman Juma Masjid, located in this port, is one of the earliest Muslim monuments in Kerala. However, the importance of this port declined in later periods.

### South Kanara

- ◆ *Muslims domination in trade activities*

Two significant medieval ports, Barkur and Mangalore, were once part of Kerala, but they are currently located in Karnataka. The port of Mangalore in South Kanara (Manjarur) served as the capital of the Alupas, a small dynasty that governed the coastal region of Karnataka. During the fourteenth century, trade in Mangalore was predominantly controlled by Muslims. Ibn Battuta provides details about a colony of four thousand Muslims residing in this port city. The horse trade played a vital role in the port's prominence. The Muslim traders controlled the supply of horses to the Deccani sultanates and the Vijayanagara Empire through this port. A medieval mosque and a Sufi shrine were located in this port town.

### Ports under the Kolathiri

- ◆ *Important ports of Dharmadam, Valapattanam, Cannanore and Madayi*

A network of interconnected bays can be found in the Kannur district of modern-day Kerala. By the 15th century, these regions were under the control of the Kolathiris, one of the three dynasties that dominated the Kerala Coast. Dharmadam, Valapattanam, Cannanore, and Madayi were important ports under their authority. These ports served as connections to the pepper-producing uplands through various rivers. Mount Eli (Ezhimala, located near the Madayi port) served as a significant landmark for medieval seafarers. Arab sources referred to this area as Hili, and it was a popular port in Kerala mentioned in many Arab records. It was also an early Muslim settlement site, housing several Sufi shrines. Ibn Battuta's records mentions about the presence of Chinese junks in the Madayi port. The decline of the Madayi port began in the 16th century due to siltation and Portuguese influence in the Cannanore port.

Cannanore port, referred to as Jurfattan in Arab sources, was the capital city of the Ali Rajas. Muslims dominated this port prior to the arrival of the Portuguese. Several ancient

- ◆ *Cannanore was known for horse trade*

mosques and Sufi tombs were located near the Cannanore port. It served as a central entry point for maritime trade, particularly for the horse trade. Valapattanam (Balipattanam or Budfattan) was another medieval port situated in the south of Kannur. Many Muslim traders had settled in this region, which was also an important Brahmanic center. During the 15th century, Bukhari Sayyids were settled in this port city. Dharmadam (Dahfattan) was another medieval port in Kannur, located on a small island formed at the confluence of the Thalassery and Anjarakandi Rivers. This port was renowned for its spice trade.

### Ports Under the Zamorin

- ◆ *Ibn Battuta states Calicut as one of the largest port*

Calicut was an important port under the Zamorin. According to Ibn Battuta, Calicut was one of the largest ports in the world, visited by merchants from China, Java, Ceylon, the Maldives, Yemen, and Persia. Muslim merchants played a significant role in this port, holding the office of Shahbandar (commercial administrator of the port cities) and overseeing its administration. Some mosques and Sufi tombs were identified in this port town. Chaliyam (Shaliyat) was another port located south of Calicut on an island formed by the Beypore and Kadalundi rivers. It was another center of Muslim trade dominated by Muslims from the region. This beautiful port city was known for the production of soft cotton fabrics called *Shali*. The fortress constructed by the Portuguese in 1531 CE was famous in this port town but was later destroyed by the Zamorin in 1571 CE. Ponnani emerged as the main arsenal of Calicut in the sixteenth century. Limited information is available about this port before the sixteenth century. Ponnani became a center of Muslim naval warfare and was associated with the *Makhdums*, a family of Muslim scholars and saints. Several old mosques and *jarams* were found in this port city, which was once a center of Islamic learning.

- ◆ *Pantalayani-kollam is associated with the introduction of Islam in Kerala*

Pantalayanikollam (Fandarina), another medieval port on the Kerala Coast, was under the rule of the Zamorin of Calicut. It was located north of Calicut, near the Kotta River. Most Arab geographers mentioned this port and associated it with traditions about the introduction of Islam to the Kerala Coast. According to Ibn Battuta, three-quarters of the town's population were Muslims, and many Chinese ships anchored in this port. Several old mosques and *jarams* were located in this port town, and two mosques were named Cheenapalli, possibly constructed by Chinese Muslims.



◆ *Multi-culture centre*

Kurakkeni Kollam is the most famous among contemporary port towns. Small settlements known as temple hubs served as gathering places for inland merchants. The local requirements were served by a number of marketplaces that were located at strategic intersections of trade routes. Inscriptions, foreign accounts, and literary references gave detailed picture of the trading centres of the medieval period. The first written record of a fully developed fortified angati in the port city of Quilon is found on the Terisapalli Copper Plate. The flow of goods in and out of Quilon, the setting of their prices, the collecting of tolls and taxes, the preservation of weights and measures, etc., are all shown through references to carts and various sorts of boats arriving at and departing from Quilon. Because of the market town, it may be concluded that Quilon possessed urban centre characteristics. Multicultural confluence was another notable feature of an urban centre. During the time of the Classical Roman Empire onward, all of Kerala's port cities had a multicultural population, but on a smaller scale than Quilon had after a thousand years. Jewish, Persian, and Arabic merchants signed the Jewish copper plates from 999 C.E., demonstrating the existence of multicultural populations in the port city. Jews, Christians, and even Muslims lived in Kerala's most significant port cities, including Quilon.

◆ *Local markets*

During this time, local markets serving the needs of the surrounding regions grew. Some of them were a little inland in the middle tract of the agricultural communities, including Bhaskarapuram, Talekat, and Kutavur. The origins of official trading hubs are shown by Bhaskarapuram and Talekat. At Talekat, inscriptional evidence demonstrates that the Manigramam, with royal support, took the initiative to allocate land and establish shops there. The local markets had a tendency to be associated with centres; for instance, the Talekat church has an inscription and the Syrian Christian influence over Manigramam is widely known.

## Trade Routes

◆ *Pepper trade*

Kerala was renowned for its pepper production. Ibn Battuta referred to the Kerala Coast as the "pepper country" or *bilad al-filfil*. He also described the high demand for Kerala pepper in foreign lands. Until the eighteenth century, black pepper from the Kerala Coast was the most significant commodity in the Cape route and the Indian Ocean spice trade. Michael Pearson highlights that "pepper surpassed all other spices in trade and everyday use."

- ◆ *Monopoly of pepper trade in the 15th century CE*

The pepper trade was a monopoly on the Kerala Coast until the fifteenth century. Muslim traders dominated the overseas spice trade since the thirteenth century, with their trade routes extending eastwards to China and westwards to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. European markets obtained goods through Venice, but their share in the spice trade was minimal. Muslims controlled the trade but not the cultivation and collection of spices. Coastal regions and inland areas of northern India, as well as Central Asian cities like Samarqand and Bukhara, connected with merchants from Gujarat and Coromandel who resided on the Kerala Coast.

- ◆ *Pepper and horses trade was conducted through overland trade routes*

Overland trade from Kerala occurred through passes in the Western Ghats mountain range, leading to Madurai and the Coromandel Coast. These trade routes existed prior to the thirteenth century. The Western Ghats facilitated overland trade through various passes, with the Palakkad Gap, Munnar Pass, and Kumaly Pass being the most important. In response to Portuguese suppression of Muslim ships in the Indian Ocean, these overland trade routes became busier in the sixteenth century. Palakkad served as a significant upland market where trade channels connected with Tamil Nadu. Approximately 7,740 quintals of pepper were transported annually through this trade route. Horses were exchanged from Cannanore port to the Vijayanagara kingdom via a land route across the ghats. The same route was utilized for pepper exchange between the hinterland of Wayanad and Karnataka during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Two other major land routes connected Cannanore with Srirangapattanam, the capital of the Wodeyars. These were the Perambadi route through Irikkur and the Peria Ghat route via north Wayanad, which were under the control of Kolathiris and Kottayam Raja during that time period.

## Summarised Overview

The disintegration of the Kulasekharas resulted in the emergence of independent principalities known as *Swarupams*. During this period, agrarian settlements expanded, and trade and commerce increased. Malayalam literary works and accounts of foreign travellers provide insights into the social conditions and trade of that time. Epigraphical evidence also contributes to reconstructing the history of the post-Perumal age. *Manipravalam* mentions Brahmin settlements in Perumpadappu *Swarupam*, while works like *Mushakavamsakavya* and *Keralolpathi* mentions about paddy cultivation. Chinese traveller Ma Huan also refers to the exchange of rice and other grains in the markets.

In agriculture, there were not many immediate changes after the fall of Perumal. Bonded labourers called *Al* were attached to the arable lands and were transferred along with the land. They served as the main agricultural labour force. *Kutiyar* (tenants) leased land from landowners and had to share a portion of the produce with the landlord. Temple functionaries such as priests, *poduvals* or secretaries, garland makers, and sweepers received *virutti* for their services. *Sanketham*, an important institution in the medieval period, existed in all major temples and possessed independent sovereign authority in their domains. *Sanketham* was responsible for the administration and management of temple lands and agrarian tracts. It also provided a safe place of asylum for the *naduvazhi* during times of internal disorder or invasion, enjoying protection from enemies.

New local customary practices and precedents known as *desamaryada* (local customs), *keezhmaryada* (precedence), and *kiliyakkam* (precedence) replaced old regulations like *Kaccams*. Although changes in agrarian relations occurred from the 12th to the 15th centuries, the basic structure remained the same.

Accounts from foreign travellers provide a detailed picture of local and long-distance trade in medieval Kerala. Local exchange centers developed near ports and in other towns, attracted merchants from different parts of India. Periodic fairs served as gathering places for specialized traders, and internal markets attracted merchants from Andra, Kalinga, Malava, and Vengra. Chinese, Jewish, and Arab merchants engaged in overseas trade with India. Ibn Battuta's account hints at the trade diasporas of Arab Muslims on the Malabar coast, noting that it is one of the greatest ports frequented by merchants from all over the world. He also mentions a large fleet of Chinese merchant vessels anchored at the port. Travellers such as Ma Haun, Abdur Razzak, Nicolo Conti, and Athanasius Nikitin refer to the rich pepper trade alongside, ginger, cinnamon, and other spices in Calicut. Marco Polo's account mentions a Chinese ship on the Malabar coast bringing porcelain, copper, silk clothes, gold, and sandals.

Dharmadam, Valapattanam, Cannanore, and Madayi were important ports under the control of the Kolathiri dynasty. Ibn Battuta's accounts mention the

presence of Chinese junks in Madayi harbor. Cannanore served as a central maritime entry point for the horse trade, while Valapattanam was another medieval port located in the south of Kannur. Dharmadam, also in Kannur, was well-known for its commerce in spices. Panthalayani Kollam, another medieval port on the Kerala coast, was governed by the Zamorin of Calicut. Many Chinese ships anchored there, and Arab geographers acknowledged this harbor, connecting it to traditions about the spread of Islam in Kerala.

Prosperous centers were surrounded by villages engaged in expanded agricultural production, and extensive trade networks that contributed to the socio-economic, political and cultural importance of the regions during the post-Perumal era of Kerala.

## Self Assessment

1. Name the literary works which give information about the agrarian system of medieval Kerala.
2. Who was the author of the book *Ying- yai- Sheng Lan*?
3. Explain *Al*.
4. What is *melvaram*?
5. Define *Viruthi*.
6. What do you know about *nattukuttam*?
7. What are *deshamaryada* and *Keezhmaryada*?
8. Which were the ports under Zamorin?
9. How do we know about the horse trade in medieval Kerala?
10. What is *changatam*?

## Assignments

1. What are the main sources for the study of post Perumal trade relations?
2. Review the growth of trade in Pantalayanikollam.
3. Trace the growth of trade and trading centres under *Swarupams*.
4. Write a short note on *Sanketham*.
5. Discuss the agrarian relation after the fall of Kulasekharas.



## Suggested Readings

1. Meera Mary Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, New Delhi, 1988.
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3. N.M Namboothiri and P.K Sivadas (ed.), *Kerala Charithrathinte Natuvazhikal* (mal.), Kottayam (2009), 2011.
4. R.Champakalakshmi, *The Medieval South Indian Guilds: Their Role in Trade and Urbanisation*, in D.N.Jha (ed), *Society and Ideology in India*, Delhi, 1996.
5. Rajan Gurukul, *The Kerala Temple and Early Medieval Agrarian System*, Sukapuram, 1992.

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1. M.R.Raghava Varier, *Aspects Urbanization in Medieval Kerala, 800-1500*, the case of Panthalayani Kollam, a working paper, Dept. of History, Calicut University, 1989.
2. Rajan Gurukul and M.R Raghava Varier (ed), *Cultural History of Kerala*, Vo. I, Govt. of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999.
3. P.J. Cherian (ed.), *Perspectives on Kerala History*, The Second Millennium, Kerala State Gazetteer Vol.II. Part II- Thiruvananthapuram, 1999.
4. Ganesh K.N, *Keralathinte Innalakal* (mal.), Department of Cultural Publications, Govt. of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1997.
5. William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol.I, AES, New Delhi, 2004.



## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.





# Pre-Modern Society

## Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ analyse the medieval land relations through the concept of *Janmam-Kanam-Maryada*
- ◆ critically evaluate caste oppressions and social exclusion
- ◆ emergence of Princely states of Travancore and Cochin

## Background

In the previous unit, we discussed the land relations in medieval Kerala, which helped us understand the interrelation between land and caste. In this chapter, we will analyze the concept of *Janmam-Kanam-Maryada*. The land system in medieval Kerala was based on the *Janmi-kudiyam sampradayam*, which refers to the landlord-tenant relation. We observed how the social hierarchy was formed with the introduction of wetland rice cultivation and the division of labour, regardless of kin-based productive systems in the Sangam age. In this section, we will illustrate the caste system and its connection to land relations. Additionally, we will analyze the emergence of the Princely States of Travancore and Cochin.

## Keywords

*Janmam-Kanam-maryada, kudiyam, uralam, karalar, caste, Travancore, Cochin*



## Discussion

### 3.4.1 Medieval Land Relations

- ◆ Land relation based on Jenmi-Kudiyan Sampradayam

The land relations in pre-modern Kerala underwent changes during the pre and post-Perumal era. From the 9th to the 12th centuries, the land system was based on *Jenmi Kudiyan Sampradayam*, which technically referred to the relationship between landlords and tenants. The term *Janmam* has its etymology in the concept of birthright. The *jati*, or caste, emerged as an institutional embodiment in the hierarchically organized agrarian society, where land rights were exchanged for goods and services. The *jati* hierarchy was further strengthened by the hereditary vocations within the domains of the king and the temple.

- ◆ Brahmadeya grants- land given to the Brahmins

This land ownership system created a fragmented agrarian society from the 9th to the 12th century. The hereditary ownership of land was given to the Brahmins by the rulers as *Brahmadeya* grants. The land grants were issued by *Naduvazhis* and landlords to temples and *Brahmins*. The hierarchy of land ownership in the 12th century Kerala are classified into five major categories, which are the following;

- ◆ *Naduvazhi*
- ◆ *Uralar*
- ◆ *Karalar*
- ◆ *Kudiyar*
- ◆ *Adiyar*

- ◆ Jenmi-Kudiyan system-Uralar, Karalar, Kudiyar, Adiyar

As mentioned the *Naduvazhis* held significant ownership of the land and donated it to temples and *Brahmins* for ritual purposes. The temple trustees, mostly from the *Brahmin* community, are collectively known as *Uralar*. The land tenants and intermediaries belonged to the *Nair* community are called *Karalar*. The cultivators of these lands may be from the *Ezhava* or *Nair* castes and are referred to as *Kudiyar*. The *Adiyar* or AI bonded labour class, belonging to the *Pulaya* caste, falls into the fifth category.

By the sixteenth century, land ownership in Kerala primarily concentrated on three groups: temples, *Brahmins*, and **Naduvazhis**. These categories of land ownership established institutionalized systems known as *Dewaswam*, *Brahmaswam*, and *Cherikkal*, respectively. Cultivators were settled on these lands and engaged in production. They



- ◆ *Maryada- laws were prescribed by jenmi to tenants*

received a specific share of their yield as payment to the *Jenmi*, the landowner. The *Jenmi*'s rights over the land were referred to as *Kiliyakkam*, and the tenant's obligations were determined by a custom called *Maryada*. The rules for *Maryada* practices were not standardized and were determined by the *Jenmi*, who held authority over the tenant's rights. The tenants' obligations were based on local customs rather than fixed laws or privileges. Different regions had their own terms for *Maryada* practices, such as *Kilmaryadai*, *Nattumaryadai*, *Desamarydai*, and *Sankethamarydai*. These localized customs and practices emerged due to the fragmented political and economic systems after the decline of the Chera dynasty. The emergence of *Swarupams* (feudal chiefs) and regional rulers led to the collapse of a centralized administrative system and the development of local customs regarding land ownership.

- ◆ *Kanam/Otti was tenants right to hold the land for 12 years*

The development of a cash-based economy brought about changes in the prevailing tenure system in Kerala, leading to the introduction of land mortgages. Tenants had the right to hold land from the *Jenmi* for a fixed period of one to twelve years in exchange for a fixed amount or share known as *Kanam* or *Otti*. This tenure system can be traced back to the Chera period. The *Kanam* land could be transformed by the tenant based on their preferences. If the tenant cultivated paddy or trees on the land, it was referred to as *Kulikkanam*. During this period, overseas trading with the Kerala coast experienced significant growth. The benefits from this international trade contributed to the generation of new income and increased the circulation of money in the economy. Alongside the practice of the *Kanam* tenure system, a powerful and wealthy intermediary group from the *Nair* castes emerged, known as *Kanakkars*. They amassed wealth and wielded influence over many *Swarupams*.

### 3.4.2 Caste Oppressions and Social Exclusion

- ◆ *Two binaries of caste- pure – impure and higher and lower*

The relationship between land and caste is interconnected. According to Rajan Gurukkal, *Jati*, which refers to one's birth, assumes a trans-familial identity of relative status recognized by one's own family. The pure and impure, as well as the higher and lower, are the two sets of binaries that form the structural foundation of each *jati*, shaping its distinct identity. Caste became institutionalized with the introduction of wetland rice cultivation, serving as a means of social discipline for exploitation and its outcomes. The establishment of strategic norms and the creation of hereditary occupational groups

likely reinforced each other.

- ◆ Kin based production system gave way to hereditary occupational system

During the 9th and 10th centuries CE, the service tenure played a role in transforming kin-based labour units into hereditary occupational groups, which later evolved into endogamous *jatis*. The occupational name became the name of an endogamous *jati* integrated into the social hierarchy. By the 11th century, the principles of *jati* were fully introduced. In the caste hierarchy, *Brahmins* held the highest position as they were the custodians of temples and ritual practices, enjoying rights and privileges. They received land grants, known as *Brahmaswom*, and also administered temple lands. Within the *Nambuthiri* caste, there were internal divisions based on wealth, ritual status, Vedic and sastric traditions, among other factors. *Nambuthiris* were the highest *jati* among the *Brahmins* and also the largest landlords. The eldest son of a *Nambuthiri* family had the right to marry within the same caste, while the other brothers formed relationships with castes such as *Ambalavasikal*, *Kshatriya*, and *Nair*, known as *Sambandham*. *Brahmins* from outside Kerala settled in different regions, including Tulu and *Saraswatha Brahmins*.

- ◆ Nairs- warrior class- next to the Brahmins in caste hierarchical order

*Nairs* and *Thiyya Jatis* held significant caste positions. *Nairs*, forming a central part of the population, were primarily warriors and held considerable influence in administration. Some *Nairs* worked as accountants and clerks for *Naduvazhis*, but they were not involved in trading and merchant activities prevalent during the medieval period. They fought for the king and were appointed as *Chavers* (suicidal squads) in the army. According to Portuguese administrator Duarte Barbosa, the dignity of *Nair* women was determined by the number of relationships they had.

- ◆ Kammalar, Mukkuvar, Pulayar, Kushavar and Parayar- faced social injustice

The *Thiyya* caste ranked below *Nairs* in the *jati* hierarchy. Traditionally, they were involved in toddy carving, and some received military training similar to the *Nairs*. *Kammalar*, *Mukkuvar*, *Pulayar*, *Kushavar*, and *Parayar* were other castes within the *Thiyya* hierarchy. They faced numerous atrocities and injustices due to the caste system. The upper castes, including *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, and *Nairs*, enjoyed special authority and privileges in society, acting as significant protectors and promoters of the injustices and atrocities associated with the caste system. Those who rejected the customs and traditions of their *jati* were expelled from their caste and family and often converted to Semitic faiths. Expelled family members were subjected to tailoring honor killings to avoid punishment from the *Naduvazhis*.



### 3.4.2.1 Women in Pre-modern Kerala

- ◆ Condition of women in pre-modern Kerala

The women from different castes in pre-modern Kerala had various rights in their families and society. The *Nambuthiri* women used *marakkuda* while appearing in public, but other castes did not follow this custom. Christian women wore *muttaak* (local dress), and Muslim women used *thattam* to cover their hair. The *Nair* women appeared in public with their husbands. They followed polygamy, which was acceptable in the then society. In North Kerala, it was customary that their spouses must be from different families and are restricted from blood relationships. In Southern Kerala, *Nair* women were only married to the eldest sons of the same family based on *Pandavaachara*. This custom may be followed to protect their family property. This ritual was followed till the beginning of the twentieth century.

- ◆ Prevalence of Untouchability in medieval Kerala

The practice of untouchability, invisibility, and inaccessibility was prevalent among the *Nambuthiris*, *Kshatriyas*, and *Nair* castes. The lower castes, such as *Nayadis* and *Pulayas*, had to maintain a distance of sixty feet from the *Nair* caste during interactions, as dictated by the customs of *Ayitham* and *Thottukudaima*. *Nair* lords made a point of avoiding contact with lower caste individuals in public. If a lower caste person blocked the path of an upper caste individual, they could face death with the consent of the authorities. The upper castes had the power to impose social customs that disadvantaged the lower castes and women in their own interests. Social justice was non-existent within the caste system in pre-modern Kerala.

- ◆ Pulappedi, Mannapedi and Parayappedi

*Pulappedi*, *Mannapedi*, and *Parayappedi* were evil customs practiced in Kerala. These customs allowed lower castes to kidnap *Nair* women on specific dates. Lower caste men would throw stones at upper caste women to capture them. In 1696 CE, the Thiruvuthamcode inscription at Kanyakumari by Kottayam Kerala Varma banned this social custom. Additionally, there was a widespread crime in Kerala where lower caste children were kidnapped and sold into the slave trade in various port cities. These social atrocities were inflicted upon lower caste people by upper caste lords within the Hindu community. As a result, many lower caste Hindus were converted to Semitic faiths and gradually increased their population throughout Kerala.

### 3.4.3 Emergence of Princely States

#### 3.4.3.1 Travancore

- ◆ *Obscurity in the Chronology of the rulers of Travancore*

As mentioned earlier, there is a lack of reliable sources regarding the chronology of the rulers of Venad. It is believed that Sri Vira Ravi Varma ascended the throne in 1595, followed by Adithya Varma and Rama Varma for a brief period from 1609 to 1611. The next significant ruler was Ravi Varma (1611-1663), during whose reign Nanjinad was invaded by Tirumala Nayak of Madurai. The Nayak expeditions into Nanjinad were justified by their claim as heirs of the Vijayanagara Empire, asserting their right to collect tribute. However, the true goals of Tirumala Nayak's expedition were to bring Venad under Madurai's rule and seize Nanjinad's wealth. Inscriptions found in Nanjinad during this period reveal repeated invasions and devastation by Tirumala Nayak's soldiers, leading to chaos in the region for almost fifty years. Another significant development during Ravi Varma's reign was the establishment of the English factory at Vizhinjam in 1644.

- ◆ *Ettuveettil Pillamar emerged as political power*

The immediate successors of Vira Ravi Varma, namely Ravi Varma and Adithya Varma, were both weak rulers. During Adithya Varma's reign, differences of opinion arose with *Yogakkar* of the Sri Padmanabhaswamy temple regarding its management. The temple administration was vested in *Ettarayogam*, a committee of eight trustees (*uralars*) under the direct control of the king. At that time, the *Yogakkar* divided the temple holdings into eight districts and appointed *Nair* noblemen, known as *Ettuveettil Pillamar*, to collect and manage the earnings of each district. The *Pillamar* held political power, while the *Yogakkar* maintained religious authority. This arrangement posed a major threat to the king's rule, leading to frequent clashes between the ruler and the temple servants. Adithya Varma passed away in 1677 at the Darpakulanagara Palace in Kalkulam.

Following Adithya Varma's death, Umayamma Rani assumed the regency as Ravi Varma, the minor prince and heir apparent to the throne. She ruled from Attingal, which was part of Venad and served as the seat of the queens of Venad kings, maintaining relative autonomy as a principality. Her reign witnessed the rivalry between the Dutch and English for control over the spice trade. According to the peace settlement of 1679, Umayamma Rani sold pepper and spices exclusively to the English. The Dutch established their



- ◆ *Attingal, seat of queens of Venad attained relatively autonomous status*

factory at Thengapattanam, while the English set up theirs at Anchuthengu. Umayamma Rani displayed diplomatic skills in her dealings with the foreign trading companies, as well as with local landlords like *Pillamar* and *Matampimar*. She insisted on strict control over the *Yogakkar* as well. Trade relations with the English remained smooth until Umayamma Rani's death in 1698. However, during Ammu Thamburan's reign with the English East India Company, tensions escalated due to the activities of the *Pillamar* and *Matampis*. The situation reached a climax on April 15, 1721, when Gyfford, Chief of the Company, who was also unpopular among the people due to his odd behavior, attempted to personally deliver customary gifts intended for the Rani of Attingal with a force of 140 men. He refused to give the gifts to the agents of the local feudal lords (*Pillamar*). It is said that Gyfford and his men were killed by the *Nairs* and were thrown into the Vamanapuram river. Following the killing, the *Nairs* attacked the fort at Anjuthengu, and the battle continued for six months, causing significant damage to both sides.

- ◆ *Rama Varma's reign- first formal treaty with English East India Company in 1723 was concluded*

Rani expressed regret and held Kudaman Pillai responsible for everything, while the king of Venad, Adithya Varma, accused Rani of being responsible for the same. Under the reign of Rama Varma, royal authority began to break down, and in April 1723, the first formal treaty between the English East India Company and the Venad ruler was signed. The treaty granted the Company complete monopoly over trade and the license to mint coins. Rama Varma's nephews, the princes of Neyyattinkara and Iraniel, also supported the Company's establishment in the region. In 1728, with the help of the Naiks of Madurai, the prince of Neyyattinkara marched to Attingal, suppressed *Pillamar*, and made his relative Karthika Thirunal the Rani. Similarly, the prince of Iraniel suppressed the *pillais* and *matampis* and ascended the throne of Thiruvithamkur as Anizham Thirunal Marthanda Varma after Rama Varma's death.

- ◆ *Rise of Marthanda Varma*

Under Anizham Tirunal Marthanda Varma's rule, Travancore began to grow into a powerful kingdom. When he ascended the throne, there was disorder and confusion throughout Thiruvithamkur, and the administration and finance of the kingdom were unsatisfactory. The feudal classes like *pillais* and *matampis* enjoyed most of the power. Marthanda Varma subjugated these classes, as well as the collateral *swarupams* and adjacent kingdoms. He focused on administrative reorganization and improved the state's finances. Special attention was given to strengthening the military, equipping the army with better arms, and enforcing



strict discipline.

◆ *Suppression of pillais and matampis*

After crushing the powers of *pillais* and *matampis*, Marthanda Varma invaded Attingal and put an end to the direct trade relations between Attingal Rani and foreign powers like the English and Dutch. He then advanced towards Quilon, and his army, led by Dalawa Arumukham Pillai, defeated Raja Unni Kerala Varma. Kayamkulam, Elayidathu *Swarupam* (Kottarakkara), and Ambalapuzha were incorporated into Travancore. The eastern frontier also received attention after suppressing the northern rebellion.

◆ *Administrative reforms*

During Marthanda Varma's rule, significant administrative reforms were introduced, and capable ministers like Ramayyan Dalawa assisted him in administration. Emphasis was placed on agriculture, irrigation facilities, and defense. Revenue collection was given special attention. In 1739, Mallan Sankaran of Palliyadi was assigned the task of settling both wet and dry regions, dividing territories into *Devaswam*, *Brahmaswam*, *Danam*, and *Pandaravaka*. The commercial department was reorganized, retaining the government's monopoly over pepper, tobacco, cassia, and areca. *Chowkies* were built to prevent smuggling, and efforts were made to collect export and import duties. Mavelikkara was designated as the headquarters for the commercial department, and salt manufacture became a state monopoly.

◆ *Pativukanamkku-annual budget-introduced*

The village served as the lowest unit of administration, headed by *pravarthikar*, with a group of villages called *Mandapathumvathukkal* under the *karyakkar*. Marthanda Varma introduced the annual budget known as *Pativukanakku*, allocating specified amounts of money for specific areas of public expenditure. His most significant action was dedicating the kingdom of Travancore to his titular deity, Sri Padmanabha, on January 3rd, 1750. Afterward, he and his successors became the servants of Sri Padmanabha (*Padmanabhadasas*) and ruled the kingdom in his name

### 3.4.3.2 Cochin

◆ *Reign of Unni Rama Koil I and Unni Rama Koil II*

Cochin emerged as a powerful princely state in premodern times. With Portuguese influence, Cochin gained prominent political power under Unni Rama Koil I and Unni Rama Koil II. The next ruler, Vira Kerala Varma (1537-1565), maintained good relations with the Portuguese initially, but their relationship soured when the Portuguese plundered the Palluruthi temple. Kesava Rama Varma, who ascended the throne in 1565, was an outstanding ruler of Cochin.



He supported men of letters and poets. During his reign, Jews settled in Cochin and established the Jew town near the palace in 1567. A successful popular uprising against the Portuguese occurred during his rule. The monarch had forced the Portuguese to collect all customs taxes at Cochin.

- ◆ Subordination of Portuguese power began with the succession of Vira Kerala Varma

Goda Varma (1637-1645), Vira Rayira Varma (1645-46), and Vira Kerala Varma (1646-1650) were the subsequent rulers. Vira Kerala Varma (1601-1615), Ravi Varma (1615-1624), and Vira Kerala Varma (1624-1637) preceded them. Rama Varma (1650-1656) ruled, and upon his death, Rani Gangadhara Lakshmi (1656-1658) became the regent, the only woman to exercise ruling power in Cochin's history. Rama Varma (1658-1662) followed, but Goda Varma, who came to power in 1662, made no significant impact. Vira Kerala Varma of the Mutha Tavazhi, with the help of the Dutch, assumed power in Cochin in 1663. The subordination of Portuguese power in Cochin began with the succession of Vira Kerala Varma. Several treaties were signed between the Dutch and Cochin. The rulers of Cochin remained weak and did not contribute significantly to strengthening the power of Cochin until the reign of (1731-1746).

- ◆ Rama Varma-attempted to regain the dignity of Perumpadappu swarupam

Rama Varma (1749-1760) attempted to restore the dignity of Perumpadappu *Swarupam*. Important political events during his rule included the creation of the northern confederacy led by Cochin, the Battle of Ambalapuzha (1754), the Zamorin invasion, and the pact between Travancore and Cochin (1757). Rama Varma also took steps to strengthen the relationship with Travancore. The most powerful ruler of Cochin was Sakthan Thampuran, a capable administrator, diplomat, and statesman who suppressed the feudal nobility. The authority of administration was entrusted to officers directly nominated by the king. The state was divided into *Kovilakathumvatukkals*, or taluks, each governed by a Karyakar. The village, under the *Pravarthikar*, served as the lowest level of government. Sakthan Thampuran maintained a centralized strategy. Corruption was eliminated, and the state's budget was improved. Special officers known as captains of *Subas* were appointed to monitor the behavior of officials. The powers of the *Brahmin* clergy were curtailed, and the institution of *Yogiatiripads*, the ecclesiastical heads of the Vadakkunnathan and *Perumanam Devaswams*, was discontinued.

- ◆ Religious attitude Sakthan Thampuran

Sakthan Thampuran displayed harsh treatment towards Latin Christians and Konkani, but a more liberal policy was adopted towards Syrian Christians. During Sakthan

Thampuran's rule, Cochin experienced social and economic advancements. Syrian Christians who settled in major towns engaged in trade, supporting the state's economy. The Raja facilitated their access to trade necessities.



## Summarised Overview

### 1. E-----

The society of medieval Kerala was structured based on caste system, which facilitated the exploitation based on agrarian relations. The caste system integrated social groups involved in paddy cultivation. The land ownership patterns varied, but agrarian relations remained constant in *Devaswom*, *Brahmaswom*, and *Pandaravaka* divisions. The hierarchy strengthened during the Perumal reign and further expanded during the age of *Swarupams*.

The origin of the caste system was a lengthy and obscure process. Its primary aim was to protect the interests of the *Namboothiri Brahmins*, who were landed aristocrats. The system was based on the *kula thozhil* tradition, where labour was hereditary and specialized in nature. Individuals were confined to specific jobs, without the freedom to pursue their ambitions. The caste ideology perpetuated dichotomies of purity-pollution and high-low, stripping the lower-caste people of their dignity. They were treated as mere bodies meant to work like animals. Caste determined economic and social status, as well as power, and reflected lifestyle, labour, and obligations.

The emergence of the princely states of Travancore and Cochin was a prolonged process involving invasion, consolidation, and suppression of feudal elements. In Travancore, from the reign of Sri Vira Ravi Varma in 1595 to Marthanda Varma, the establishment of a powerful princely state was ongoing. During the period of Adithya Varma, the *Ettuveetil Pillamar* and *Yogakkar* emerged as powerful feudal elements, curbing the power of the king. Umayammaramani suppressed the *matampis* and *pillais*, and established trade relations with the English East India Company. However, with the accession of Ammu Thampuran, who later became the heroine of the Attingal Revolt, the situation changed.

Marthanda Varma's reign transformed Travancore. He suppressed the *Ettuveetil pillamar* and other feudal lords, introducing administrative changes for the welfare of the people and the kingdom. Revenue administration received special attention, and the land was divided into *Devaswom*, *Brahmaswom*, and *Pandaravaka* divisions. A monopoly on salt manufacturing was established, while pepper trade was retained. Marthanda Varma expanded the kingdom and dedicated it to Sri Padmanabha, the titular deity, securing the kingdom from future attacks and internal dissensions deemed irreligious.

Cochin gained prominence under Sakthan Thampuran, but its beginnings can be traced back to rulers like Unni Rama Koil I and Unni Rama Koil II. Cochin's subordination to the Portuguese began with Vira Kerala Varma. Rama Varma attempted to restore the dignity of Perumpadappu *swarupam*. Later, under Sakthan Thampuran, Cochin emerged as a powerful princely state. Feudal lords were suppressed, and administration was entrusted to officers directly appointed by the king. Efficiency in administration



was emphasized through the appointment of officers, and the power of the *Yogiatiripads* was curtailed. Numerous welfare measures were implemented, including irrigation, road and canal construction, and trade was prioritized. Thus, Cochin under Sakthan Thampuran and Travancore under Marthanda Varma gained prominence as powerful princely states in the subsequent period.

### Self Assessment

1. Define the concept of *Janmam-Kanam-Maryada*.
2. What do you know about *Pulappedi* and *Manappedi* ?
3. Which ruler abolished *Pulappedi* and *Manappedi* in Travancore?
4. What does the term *Pandavachara* means?
5. What is *ettarayogam*?
6. When did the Attingal revolt occur?
7. Who introduced *pathivukanakku* Travancore?
8. What is *Mandapathumvathukkal*?
9. What do you know about *Trippatidanam*?
10. What were *Kovilakathumvatukkals*?

### Assignments

1. Review the emergence of Cochin as a Princely State.
2. Briefly explain the emergence of Modern Travancore was a powerful kingdom under Marthanda Varma.
3. Write a short note on Attingal Revolt.
4. Bring out the features of medieval land relations.
5. Examine the development of caste as a social institution in medieval Kerala.



## Suggested Readings

1. Rajan Gurukul and M.R Raghava Varrier (ed), *Cultural History of Kerala*, Vo. I, Govt. of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999.
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4. M. G. S. Narayanan, *Foundations of South Indian Society and Culture*, Bharatiya Book Corporation, 1994.
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2. K. M. Panikkar, *History of Kerala*, Life Span publishers, 2020.
3. M.G.S.Narayanan, *Kerala Charithrathinte Atisthana Silakkal*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1974.
4. Rajan Gurukul, *The Kerala Temple and Early Medieval Agrarian System*, Sukapuram, 1992.
5. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Warriar, *Kerala Charithram*(Part II), Vallathol Vidhyapitham, 2012.

## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



# Into Colonial Political and Economic Changes

**BLOCK-04**



# Foreign Interventions

## Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ review the historiography related to European settlements in Kerala
- ◆ analyse the Portuguese monopolisation of trade through Cartaz
- ◆ critically examine influence of the Portuguese on Kerala Culture
- ◆ examine the political Tussle of the Portuguese in the Malabar Coast

## Background

In the 19th century, trade relations in Kerala underwent significant changes. The political situation favored the Europeans, allowing them to not only achieve their goal of trade monopoly but also gain political dominance in Kerala. The emergence of *Swarupams* and disunity among the chieftains worked in favour of the European powers. The exploitative nature of the caste-based land system and agricultural expansion further facilitated their economic and political gains. This unit examines the arrival of European powers, particularly the Portuguese, on the Malabar Coast and their subsequent expansion throughout Kerala. It explores how the Portuguese monopolised trade through political tactics and discusses their cultural influence in Kerala, particularly their religious policies.

## Keywords

Matrilineal System, *Cruzados*, Patrilineal System, *Cassados*, *Cartaz*, *Kattanars*, *Pazhayakuru*, *Puthenkuru*



## Discussion

### 4.1.1 Historiography and Sources of Portuguese, Dutch, French and English Settlements in Kerala

#### ◆ Foreign accounts

The major historical sources of the 16th century are the writings of Ludovico De Varthema and Duarte Barbosa. Varthema, an Italian writer, traveled in India between 1502 and 1508, left behind a valuable record of his impressions. His account of Calicut, its government, and its people is particularly interesting. Duarte Barbosa, a Portuguese subject, served his government in Malabar from 1500 to 1516. He was well versed in the Malayalam language and had the opportunity to study the lives of the people intimately. The account he has written about Kerala is a treasure trove of information.

#### ◆ Account of Cochin

Caesar Frederick, a merchant from Venice, undertook a voyage to the East Indies from 1563 to 1581 and also visited Malabar. His account of Cochin provides a good impression of the commercial importance of the port and the special privileges enjoyed by the Portuguese there.

#### ◆ Master Ralph Fitch mentioned port and people of Cochin

Master Ralph Fitch, the first Englishman to visit Kerala, arrived in Cochin in 1583. In his work, he describes the port and the people of Cochin. He lived there for several months, allowing him to study the lives of the people closely. While passing through Quilon, he also mentions the pepper trade in that area. Pyrard de Laval, a Frenchman and writer, visited Calicut early in the 17th century was impressed by their religious freedom there. He also observed the judicial and administrative systems prevailing in Calicut. Pietro Delle Velle, a distinguished Roman, visited Calicut and Mangalore on a Portuguese ship in 1623. His letters shed light on the lives of the people of Calicut and the state of affairs in the Kingdom of the Ikkeri Nayaks, who ruled over the Kasaragod-Hosdurg area in North Kerala during the latter half of the 17th and first half of the 18th centuries.

In addition to the accounts of foreign travellers mentioned above, there are other sources of information for the history of the Portuguese period. The letters of Jesuit missionaries who worked in Kerala contain valuable references to political events and important figures of the time, particularly in the Purakkad Kingdom and the principalities of the Karappuram

◆ *Letters of Jesuit Missionaries*

Kaimals, which are now part of the Alleppey District. Another notable work from that period is the *Historia Do Malavar* (History of Malabar) written by Diogo Gonsalves of the Society of Jesus. He worked as a missionary on the Kerala Coast and was at Arthunkal in 1610. This work, written in 1615, sheds light on the political and social conditions of the era. The accounts of Linschoten, who came to India as Secretary to the Archbishop of Goa from 1583 to 1589, are also useful to reconstruct the history of the period. When the Dutch captured Cochin in 1663, Sir Thomas Herbert, who visited Cochin, provides interesting glimpses of the place.

◆ *Political, social and cultural life of Kerala*

◆ *Systematic work based on archival sources*

*The History of Kerala, 1498-1800* by K.M. Panikkar is a monumental work that analyzes the Portuguese, Dutch, and Mysore relations, as these powers were connected to every part of Kerala during each successive period. The work delves into the political, social, and cultural life of Kerala. Panikkar's other work, "Malabar and the Portuguese," analyzes the Portuguese trade relations with Kerala. In this work, he affirms that the Portuguese never had an "Empire" in India, but rather a few coastal towns, with their authority never extending beyond a few miles of their naval bases. M.O. Koshy's "The Dutch Power in Kerala" is a systematic research work based on archival materials, which examines the most crucial period of the Dutch power in Kerala from 1729-1758. The study analyses the Dutch conflict with Calicut and Travancore rulers, the confrontation with the Travancore raja, and the trade relations. It also highlights the effects and impacts of Dutch rule in Kerala.

### 4.1.2 Political Penetration and Mercantile Contracts

◆ *Advent of Portuguese*

Portuguese were the pioneers among the European trading companies' voyages to the Malabar Coast. Immanuel, the King of Portugal, had obtained the Pope's sanction to explore new areas of trade and acquire them. This papal sanction added to the king's ambition to reach the west coast of India and dominate the Indian Ocean trade zone through conquest. He had prior knowledge of the sea route to the West Coast with the help of Bartolomeo Dias, a well-known explorer of sea routes between Eastern Africa and India. He also gathered knowledge about the land and its people by sending spies. Later, Vasco-da-Gama arrived in Calicut on May 18th, 1498, via the Cape of Good Hope, the Zamorin ruler of Calicut, warmly welcomed him but kept him under custody for a few days as a protective measure against



possible attacks by the Marakkars. Gama considered this as a humiliation. However, Vasco-da-Gama's expedition marked the beginning of Portuguese efforts in commerce, politics, and proselytization in the region. He returned home in 1499.

◆ *Portuguese settlement in Calicut*

Pedro Alvares Cabral, a Portuguese explorer of Brazil, arrived in Calicut in 1500 with thirteen ships loaded with goods for trade with India. He encountered conflicts with Arab merchants, and many of his associates were murdered. Before returning to Portugal in 1501 the Portuguese set up a shore agency in Cochin and burned down some Indian ships. Despite the challenges, Cabral's mission was not a failure. His agent, Aires Correa, reached a settlement with the Zamorin, and the Portuguese were granted with the right to establish a factory in Calicut. Competition between local Arabs and the Portuguese in Indian waters led to a crisis in relations between the Portuguese and Calicut. The Portuguese captured Arab vessels and massacred the crew, which enraged the people of Calicut. The angry mob destroyed the Portuguese factory and killed more than half of the Portuguese on land. Cabral left Calicut in a panic and sailed to Cochin.

◆ *Cabral's expedition*

In December 1500, Captain Cabral reached Cochin, where he was warmly welcomed by the King of Cochin. The King provided them with all the facilities for trade and entered into treaty with the Portuguese, granting them permission to build a factory. The rulers of Quilon and Cannanore also extended cordial invitations to Cabral and promised assistance in loading his ships on favorable terms. The Kolathiri King aided Cabral in loading additional cargo onto his ships. However, Cabral faced a strong fleet from the Zamorin and suffered significant losses. Despite the challenges, Cabral's expedition was a triumph for the Portuguese. The King of Cochin provided them with a secure harbor to safeguard their commercial and political interests on the Kerala Coast even before Cabral's return to Portugal.

◆ *Vasco da Gama's relation with Cochin and Quilon*

In 1502 Vasco-Da-Gama returned to India with 20 ships. He demanded compensation for the losses incurred during his previous arrival and sought to remove Marakkar from the Malabar coast. He committed atrocities in Calicut, including killing Muslim traders, fishermen, and even native men, women, and children. He then sailed to Cochin and forced the Raja of Cochin to sign a treaty, through which the Raja was compelled to sell pepper, cardamom, and other spices from his kingdom to the Portuguese at prices determined by the Portuguese captain and the Raja. Vasco-Da-Gama also

maintained a friendly relationship with Quilon. In a hurry to protect the valuable cargo, Vasco-Da-Gama left Cochin. While returning, he encountered the Zamorin's fleet but managed to sail away without significant losses.

◆ *Pachecco defeat of Zamorin*

The King of Cochin, an ally of the Portuguese, was attacked by the Zamorin of Calicut even before the arrival of Francisco d' Albuquerque, the Portuguese viceroy who converted the factory at Cochin into a strong fortress. He left India after leaving the Defence of Cochin under the command of Pachecco. He set up a factory at Quilon. After the departure of Albuquerque, the Zamorin again attacked the King of Cochin. Pachecco defeated the Zamorin in four pitched battles. Cranganore town was taken from the Zamorin in 1504 and fortified by the Portuguese. By renouncing his allegiance to Calicut, the Raja of Cranganore agreed to be protected by the Portuguese. The Portuguese won the opening battle in Kerala when they took control of Cranganore. Quilon, Cochin, and Cannanore had established commercial interests by this point. He greatly enhanced the prestige of the Portuguese in the eyes of the native powers.

◆ *Cassados- emerged as merchant communities*

Later, Almeida also encouraged the establishment of "factories and fortresses". The establishment of the Portuguese fortress in 1505 in Cochin caused the emergence of new settlements in the Coastal Regions. Thus, a new settlement began to strike root, a little away from the native Cochin. The King and the Governors of Portuguese in India encouraged the unmarried Portuguese male residents to marry the local Indian women in order to increase the population of those living within the sphere of Portuguese culture. Gradually, a number of Portuguese factories were constructed and the Portuguese settled around them. The King and Affonso De Albuquerque encouraged mixed marriages. Albuquerque encouraged the *Cassados* (married settlements) to conduct local trade. There was reference to bakers, shoemakers, tavern keepers, and tailors. During the sixteenth century, trade began to develop. It helped to increase the number of Portuguese 'Cassados'. Gradually, these *Cassados* began to develop as a prominent section of society. They formed an important part of the merchant communities in Portuguese Asia. The emergence of *Cassados* as a bourgeoisie class in the Indian Ocean region. They played a very important role in restructuring the commercial strategy of the Portuguese.

After Albuquerque, there were no capable men for



◆ *Corrupted administration*

administration and they were too corrupt also. The interference in the administration and conflict of the native rulers continued. Lopo Soarez made an attempt to kill the Zamorin with the help of the Portuguese, but failed. This renewed the conflict between Zamorin and Portuguese. He entered a treaty with Quilon for pepper trade, but they didn't pay any dues at Quilon port. During De Sequiera's period, Cochin made an unsuccessful attempt to invade Calicut. Execution of Balia Hassan, Naval Captain of Raja of Cannanore strained the relationship between Portuguese and Kolathiri.

#### **4.1.2.1 Cartaz and Monopolisation of Trade**

◆ *Monopolisation of trade through Cartaz*

According to convention, the ruler had control over the sea adjacent to his territory. In Arabic, the term "*Cartaz*" refers to the ruler's permission to sail in his sea. This term indicates that Arab rulers imposed this practice on mariners navigating through their waters. The Mamluk Sultans and Chinese rulers also followed this practice. The Zamorin and the Ali Raja also had a system of granting formal sanction for sailing in their waters. However, Portuguese rulers claimed control over the vast ocean far beyond their territory based on Papal authority and aggressively enforced "*Cartaz*" wherever their ships reached. They used the *Cartaz* system as an excuse to attack traders sailing in the Arabian Sea. The Portuguese issued a code of conduct for navigation with native ships, and if violated, the ships were confiscated along with their cargo, and the people on board were enslaved. Thus, under the pretext of checking *Cartaz*, Portuguese officials attacked and seized the vessels of the Marakkar traders heading to Ottoman trade centres. These actions upset both the traders and the local rulers, who held authority over their waters. Conflicts occurred under these circumstances, and sailors approached the Zamorin, demanding immediate action against the Portuguese.

◆ *Portuguese supremacy over the Indian Ocean*

Apart from imposing *Cartaz* system, the Portuguese attempted to impose certain trade restrictions on the Malabar Coast and claimed supremacy over the Indian Ocean. They constructed fortresses and trading factories on the West Coast (Goa, Diu, Daman), the Coromandel Coast (Nagapattanam, Mylapore, Tranquebar), and in Bengal (Hooghly, Dacca, Chittagong). Albuquerque proposed the establishment of factories and forts in Cochin, Cannanore, and Quilon. These Portuguese possessions were heavily fortified settlements accessible by sea.

◆ *Portuguese relation with Travancore*

The Queen of Kollam sought a friendly relationship with the Portuguese and invited them for trade. She agreed that the local merchants would accept “*Cartazs*” from the captain of the fortress, indicating her willingness to become a vassal of the King of Portugal for the prosperity of her capital town. As a result, maritime trade in Kollam began to flourish. The King of Travancore desired to construct a fortress to control the trade. In 1599, the King initiated the construction of a fortress near the Portuguese fortress in Kollam. The Portuguese, in turn, attempted to destroy the Travancore fort at Kollam. During this time, the Archbishop of Goa visited Kerala in connection with the Synod of Diamper and urged the King to demolish the fortress to ensure the safety and security of Portuguese trade. However, the King of Travancore persisted in his efforts to control the trade by fortifying Kollam.

◆ *Maritime Trade*

The Portuguese increasingly focused on maritime trade with Kerala and reaped substantial profits from the spice trade. As the demand for commodities grew, production expanded, and new areas were cultivated. Portuguese trade injected more cash into the market, and transactions in those factories also involved indigenous coins. Kollam had large coins called “*Tanga*” and small coins called “*panam*.” The trade between Kollam and the Portuguese brought about significant socio-economic changes in Kollam during the 16th century. However, by the end of the 16th century, changes occurred in Portuguese trade with Kollam. The Portuguese share of the world’s pepper exports and the export of other commodities declined. Kollam and Kayamkulam, known for pepper cultivation, re-established their connections with Asian merchants and decided to sell their pepper in open markets.

◆ *Issues with Mappila traders*

There were tensions between the Portuguese and the Mappila Muslims of Kerala. The Muslims held a trade monopoly in the Indian Ocean, which contributed to the growth of overseas trade in various coastal regions of Kerala. The Portuguese aimed to dismantle this monopoly to establish their own trade in Kerala. The Portuguese government instructed the Governors and Viceroys to favor Hindu and Christian merchants from the Indian subcontinent over Muslim merchants. They sought to bypass local traders and establish direct relationships with the kings. In their trade dealings with the rulers of Kerala, the Portuguese insisted on having a monopoly on the spice trade. Shaik Zainuddin noted that if native ships lacked a



pass, the Portuguese would “seize it, its crew, and its cargo.”

### 4.1.3 Influence of the Portuguese on Kerala Culture

#### ◆ *Political changes*

The Portuguese contact led to some changes in the political, economic, and social fields of Kerala. The most important political influence was the political disunity of Kerala, which was confirmed by the century and a half of Portuguese contact. On the eve of the Portuguese arrival, the Zamorin of Calicut took a bold step towards the political unification of Kerala under his hegemony. The arrival of the Portuguese reversed this process and accelerated the pace of the ‘Balkanisation’ of the country. It was the basic aim of Portuguese policy in Kerala to strengthen the power and prestige of the minor chiefs at the expense of the major kings. Among the minor powers which became powerful under Portuguese patronage were Purakkad, Parur, and Vettat. The political disunion of Kerala, thus sedulously fostered by the Portuguese, helped to sustain the political vacuum in the country. It paved the way for its conquest by the Mysore rulers and the English in the later period.

#### ◆ *War techniques*

The impact of the Portuguese on traditional Kerala society was profound, as they had to deal with a social and religious system that was entirely different from their own. The Portuguese introduced gunpowder, revolutionising warfare by making artillery the most important aspect of the army. The Nairs, the traditional warrior class trained in sword and shield combat, found themselves in a hopeless situation and faced a widespread threat of unemployment. Christians and Muslims, on the other hand, found new employment opportunities in the artillery and cavalry, which gained increasing prominence within the army. Local powers imitated Portuguese techniques and weapons of warfare.

#### ◆ *Education*

The Portuguese contact brought changes to the economy as well. They disrupted the long-established trade connections between Kerala, Arabia and Egypt. Trade with Europe expanded, which introduced new sources of wealth to the region. Increased trade with Europe also brought European fashion and luxury goods. The Portuguese introduced ornamental architecture and bungalow-style buildings on the Malabar Coast. The Portuguese introduced several new agricultural products to India, including cashew nuts, tobacco, and custard apples. They also had an impact on the educational and cultural fields. The Portuguese established

theological seminaries and colleges in Cochin, Cranganore, Ankamali, and Vaipincotta to train Christian priests. These institutions helped spread knowledge of Latin and Portuguese among the local population. Native rulers, such as the King of Cochin, were reported to have mastered the Portuguese language. The Portuguese period marked the beginning of Indological studies and research by European scholars. Garcia Da Orta's work on medicinal plants of India is one of the earliest studies on the subject.

◆ *Influence on religion*

The traditional caste structure also experienced significant strain under Portuguese influence. Untouchables among the Hindus converted to Christianity, as the Portuguese encouraged conversions. Those who converted enjoyed economic benefits and privileges that they did not have as Hindus. The Portuguese hindered Muslim trade in important goods. Both domestic and foreign trade was deliberately curtailed. Muslims who dominated in trade and commerce were reduced to the role of small-scale retail traders dealing with relatively minor items.

◆ *Influence on Architecture*

The ecclesiastical architecture of Kerala was influenced by Portuguese ideas and styles. During the period of Portuguese trade contact, the old towns began to decline. As a result, Calicut, Cochin, and Chaliyam gained prominence, while Quilon and Cranganore suffered due to lack of support.

◆ *Cultural Influence*

St. Francis Xavier translated the Catechism into Malayalam and provided valuable information about the Kerala Coast. Observers like Duarte Barbosa and Gasper Correa highlighted the benefits of Portuguese contact with Kerala. Joannese Gonsalvez, a Spanish Jesuit, created typefaces in the local language for printed books. The Portuguese established printing presses in Cochin and Vaipincotta. The *Chavittunatakam*, which originated from Hindu *Kathakali*, became a popular form of Christian entertainment under the patronage of the Portuguese missionaries.

◆ *Latinisation process*

The Portuguese had a liberal religious policy towards the Christian Church in Kerala, but their interactions with local Christians reflected a narrow-minded and bigoted mindset. They considered it their duty to spread the supremacy of the Pope throughout Kerala. The process of Latinisation began, and churches, monasteries, and seminaries were established for that purpose. The diocese of Cochin was established in 1557 for Latin Christians who previously belonged to the Syrian Church or converted from Hinduism. St. Francis

Xavier, the famous Jesuit missionary, was carrying out evangelisation work in South Kerala, while other Jesuit missionaries were active along Kerala's coastline, including Shertallai. The Cochin Diocese also had authority over those who recently converted to the Latin rite through the missionaries' efforts.

### **The Synod of Diamper (1599)**

The most significant event in the history of the Kerala Church during the Portuguese period was the *Synod of Diamper* (Udayamperur). It was held in June 1599 with the aim of eradicating what was referred to as the "Nestorian Heresy" and bringing the Christian communities under the authority of the Roman Church. The synod was presided over by the Archbishop of Goa and attended by a total of 813 delegates, including 133 Kattanars (priests), 20 deacons, and 660 laymen chosen by each parish. The Syrian books were examined, and objectionable passages were removed by the synod. Heretical books were burned, and changes were made to the Mass of the Syriac Liturgy to align it with the Latin Mass. The synod severed the longstanding connection between the Kerala Church and the Patriarchate of Babylon, establishing the supremacy of the Roman Pontiff over the Kerala Church. Those who followed the Latin rite belonged to the Cochin Diocese, while those who adhered to the Syriac rite remained in the Old Syrian Diocese of Angamaly. After the Synod of Diamper, Archbishop Menezes, accompanied by five Jesuits, visited important churches as far as Quilon before returning to Goa in November 1599.

♦ Christian community under Roman supremacy

### **Revolt at the Coonan Cross (1653)**

The success of the Synod of Diamper was short-lived as a violent quarrel soon erupted between the Syrian Christians and the Portuguese authorities. The appointment of European Latin Bishops to the Syrian Diocese of Ankamali by the King of Portugal, based on the authority granted to him by the Pope (Padroado), was met with resentment by the Syrians. Although they reluctantly accepted it under pressure during the synod of Diamper, they strongly desired a bishop of their own rite. In 1653, in response to the Syrians' request, the Jacobite Patriarch of Babylon sent Bishop Ahatalla to Kerala. However, the Portuguese authorities detained him at Mylapore. The news of Ahatalla's detention caused confusion among the Syrians, and a large number of Syrian Christians gathered at the gates of Portuguese Cochin.

♦ Appointment of Latin Bishop of Syrian Diocese



◆ *Division  
Pazhayakuru  
Puthankuru*

Rumors also spread that Ahatalla had been drowned by the Portuguese authorities. In their excitement, the Syrians assembled in front of an ancient cross in Mattancherry, tied a long rope to it, and, holding onto it, swore that they would no longer obey the Latin Archbishop or the Jesuits. This event became known as the “Oath of the Coonan Cross”. The Syrians then went to Alangad and consecrated their leader, Archdeacon Thomas, as their Metropolitan. This event marked a significant turning point in the history of the Kerala Church, leading to the division of Christians into two distinct factions: the Romo-Syrians, who remained loyal to the Church of Rome, and the Jacobite Syrians, who rejected the authority of the Pope. The former were popularly known as *Pazhayakuru*, and the latter as *Puthankuru*.

◆ *Latinisation  
Partially  
successful*

The Coonan Cross revolt had a profound impact on the loyalties of Syrian Christians throughout Kerala. Out of approximately 200,000 Syrian Christians, only 400 continued to pledge allegiance to the Latin Archbishop. The Syrians regarded the Archdeacon as their only Archbishop and continued to worship under him according to the Syrian Rite. Thus, the Portuguese’s attempt to Latinize the Kerala Church was only partially successful. The Portuguese viewed Latinisation as their duty to replace the authority of the Patriarch of Babylon with that of the Pope of Rome over the Kerala Church and to substitute the “Syriac liturgy” with the Latin Liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church.

◆ *Conflicts and  
resolutions*

Apart from internal conflicts and incessant quarrels among the principalities and the minor ruling powers, there was conflict between European powers for trade monopoly in Kerala. The arrival of Dutch, French and English change the political scenario of Kerala. The conflicts and resolutions continued, which we discussed in the next unit in detailed.

## Summarised Overview

The arrival of the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English traders on the west coast brought changes to the exchange ties of the period. Prior to their arrival, Arab, Jewish, Christian, and Chinese merchants participated in maritime exchanges, maintaining a collaborative and peaceful relationship. However, the Europeans disrupted this balance by seeking monopolies, leading to conflicts and rivalries among the merchants.

Foreign accounts provide significant information about the European powers in Kerala. Ludovico De Varthema and Duarte Barbosa's writings shed light on the port of Calicut during the Portuguese arrival, while Ceaser Frederick described the port of Cochin and the privileges enjoyed by the Portuguese. Ralph Fitch's records offer insights into Cochin and Quilon. Foreign travelers' accounts narrate the socio-political conditions of Kerala during the Europeans' arrival, with Sir Thomas Herbert providing information about Cochin during the Dutch arrival.

The Portuguese were the first European power to arrive in Kerala for trade. Vasco da Gama's arrival in Calicut in 1498 marked a significant moment in Kerala's history. The Portuguese arrival disrupted the trade equilibrium along Kerala's coasts, affecting Arab, Chinese, and Egyptian traders. They established a trade monopoly through *Cartaz* and sought to eliminate other countries engaged in trade with Kerala. Local merchants, particularly Marakkars, were considered enemies, and the Portuguese bypassed them by directly engaging with rulers. The Portuguese established friendly relations with Quilon, Cochin, Kolathiri, while their relationship with Zamorin was often volatile. The Cochin Raja supported the Portuguese from the beginning, aiming to develop trade and commerce in Cochin and seeking protection from the Zamorin's invasions.

The Portuguese contact had political, economic, and social consequences. Politically, the Portuguese exploited the disunity among Kerala's rulers and established a pepper monopoly. They formed treaties with Quilon, Cochin, and Kolathunadu, and built factories and forts in Cochin and Quilon. Various governors, including Vasco da Gama, Cabral, Almeida, Albuquerque, and Lopo Soares, sought political influence for trade monopoly in Kerala. The Portuguese focused primarily on maritime trade and reaped significant profits from the spice trade. They further disrupted Kerala's political unity through their involvement in rulers' rivalries, often taking sides.

The arrival of the Portuguese brought significant changes in warfare techniques. Gunpowder and artillery were introduced, becoming essential elements of the army. The traditional warrior groups of Nair lost their importance, while Christians and Muslims gained training and became integral parts of the army.

The religious policy of the Portuguese was not liberal; they aimed to Latinise Kerala. The Synod of Diamper in 1599 aimed to bring the Christian communities

under the supremacy of the Roman Church. Seminaries and colleges were established to train youths and priests. However, the Portuguese's Latinization process was not entirely successful. The appointment of European Latin Bishops to the Syrian Diocese of Ankamali caused resentment among Syrian Christians. In response to their request, the bishop of the Jacobite Patriarch was sent to Kerala but was detained by the Portuguese in Mylapore. Rumors circulated that he had drowned, leading Syrian Christians to gather at the ancient Cross in Mattancherry and take an oath to never obey the Latin Archbishop. This event, known as the Oath of Coonan Cross, resulted in the formation of two distinct Christian groups.

The arrival of the Portuguese marked a new chapter in Kerala's history, bringing about changes in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. Other European powers followed suit, ultimately leading to the supremacy and monopoly of European powers, particularly the British.

## Self Assessment

1. Who was the ruler of Portugal during the Vasco da Gama expedition to India?
2. What do you know about *Cartaz*?
3. Briefly write the importance of Coonan Cross Oath.
4. Who defeated Zamorin in 1504 and captured Cannanore town?
5. Who were *Cassados*?
6. What is *tanga* and *panam*?
7. What do you know about *Synod of Diamper*?
8. Name the prominent ports during the period of Portuguese.

## Assignments

1. Critical evaluate the political tussle of the Portuguese in the Malabar Coast.
2. Review how foreign accounts helped to understand the history of Kerala during the colonial period.
3. Analyse the religious policy of Portuguese in Kerala.
4. Bring out the impact of Portuguese influence in Kerala.
5. Give an account of the Portuguese monopolisation of trade in Kerala



9. What do you know about Almeida?
10. What changes occurred in warfare with the coming of the Portuguese?

## Suggested Readings

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## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

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## Colonialism and Resistance

### Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the relation between Zamorin and Portuguese
- ◆ identify the role of Kunjali Marakkar in his struggle against the colonial powers
- ◆ illustrate the relation between Marthanda Varma and Dutch

### Background

In the previous unit, we discussed the arrival of European powers and their political influence in Kerala. After the Portuguese, who were the first to venture to the Malabar Coast, other European trading companies followed. However, each company eventually lost its dominance due to rivalry and competition for monopoly. Nevertheless, their presence did not completely disappear. They coexisted, often opposing each other and engaging with local rulers. In this unit, we will examine the relationships between the Portuguese and the Zamorin, as well as the Dutch and Travancore. We will also discuss the resistance led by Kunjali Marakkar and analyse the expulsion of the Dutch from Kerala under Marthanda Varma.

### Keywords

*Kunchukuttakkar, Pulli Pattalam, Valia Yejaman, Kunjali Marakkar, Zamorin, Kolathiri*



## Discussion

### 4.2.1 Zamorins and the Portuguese

- ◆ *Relation of Portuguese with Zamorin was not cordial*

The relationship between the Zamorin and the Portuguese was not stable during the Portuguese period in Kerala. The Portuguese arrived at a time when the Zamorin was attempting to establish his authority and unify Kerala politically. The Portuguese contacted Zamorin's during Vasco da Gama's first visit and he was warmly welcomed by the Zamorin. However, the relationship became less cordial due to conflicts between the Portuguese and local traders, particularly Kunjali Marakkars, the chief of the Zamorins Naval Fleet. The rivalry between the Zamorin, the *Raja* of Cochin, and the Kolathiri created favorable conditions for the Portuguese to establish trade monopoly. They allied with Cochin in the rivalry against the Zamorin, providing the Raja of Cochin with foreign support and strengthening his political position against his traditional enemy.

- ◆ *Trade relation with Kolathiri*

In 1498, when Portuguese captain Vasco da Gama arrived in Calicut, the Zamorin warmly welcomed him. Vasco da Gama requested permission from the Zamorin to leave a factor in charge of unsold goods, but the Zamorin refused. The king of Calicut demanded the Portuguese to pay customs duties according to local law. As a result, Vasco da Gama left for Cannanore, where the Kolathiri ruler extended favourable treatment to him for trade. During a visit by Portuguese captain Cabral, he obtained permission from the Zamorin to establish a factory in Calicut, but the attempt failed due to competition and rivalry among Arab merchants.

- ◆ *Cochin- Portuguese relation alarmed Zamorin*

During Vasco da Gama's second visit, he asked the Zamorin to expel Muslims from the city, but the Zamorin rejected the request. In retaliation, Vasco da Gama bombarded the city and brutally attacked local merchants. The natives then launched an attack on the Portuguese ships and their entire crew. These disturbances created unrest along the Malabar Coast, and Vasco da Gama proceeded to Cochin. The growing relationship between the Portuguese and the Raja of Cochin alarmed the Zamorin, who demanded Cochin to expel the Portuguese, but the request was rejected by the Raja of Cochin. Cochin resisted the Zamorin's attack with the help of the Portuguese.

In Cranganore, the Zamorin faced a similar situation. The Portuguese captured Cranganore from the Zamorin in 1504



- ◆ *Established commercial interest- Quilon, Cochin and Cannannore*

and fortified the town. The Raja of Cranganore abandoned his allegiance to Calicut and sought protection from the Portuguese. The capture of Cranganore marked a significant victory for the Portuguese in Kerala. Their commercial interests were now firmly established in Quilon, Cochin, and Cannanore. The Zamorin's attempt to form an alliance with the Egyptian fleet to destroy Portuguese power in Kerala also failed.

- ◆ *Formal treaty with Portuguese and Zamorin*

In December 1513, a formal treaty was signed between the Portuguese under Albuquerque and the Zamorin. According to the treaty, the Portuguese were allowed to build a fort in Calicut at a location of their choice, engage in unrestricted trade, and obtain pepper from the kingdom through barter. In return, the Zamorin promised to pay tribute to the Portuguese king from his customs revenue and compensate them for the destruction of their factory in Calicut. The Portuguese, in turn, pledged to support the Zamorin in his conflicts with Cochin and Cannanore. The 1513 settlement was a remarkable triumph for Portuguese diplomacy.

- ◆ *Kunjali Marakkar's fleet strain their relation*

The presence of the fleet under Kunjali Marakkars strained relations between the Zamorin and the Portuguese. In 1531, Kutti Ali Marakkar, the prominent captain of the Zamorin's fleet, was killed, and Kunjali-II took his place. Kunjali-II developed a habit of capturing Portuguese vessels and massacring their entire crews. The two fleets clashed on multiple occasions at sea. During the siege of Edappalli led by Martin D'Souza in 1536, Kunjali appeared before Cochin and forced the Portuguese forces to withdraw from Edappalli.

- ◆ *Neutrality in war between Zamorin and other powers*
- ◆ *Monopoly of trade at Calicut port*

By this time, the Zamorin had grown weary of fighting, and his treasury had become bankrupt due to the decline in trade revenue from Calicut. In January 1540, he entered into another treaty with the Portuguese. According to this treaty, the Zamorin agreed to sell pepper from his territories to the Portuguese in Calicut at the same rates as in Cochin. Additionally, the Zamorin agreed to recognize Portuguese passports for Arab vessels navigating the region. The treaty also ensured Portuguese neutrality in conflicts between the Zamorin and other local powers. The treaty of 1540 proved beneficial for both parties. The Portuguese gained a trade monopoly at the port of Calicut, while the Zamorin enjoyed unrestricted freedom to deal with local powers, knowing that the Portuguese would not intervene in their wars. The relationship between the Zamorin and the Portuguese

soured following the brutal murder of Kunjali Marakkar, and it remained strained until the Portuguese were expelled from Kerala in 1663 CE.

#### 4.2.2 Kunjali Marakkars and Portuguese

##### ◆ Kunjalis relation with Portuguese

After their initial encounters, the Kunjali Marakkars developed a friendly relationship with the Portuguese. They were supportive of the Portuguese in the early years. Despite occasional disputes, Portuguese relations with the Kunjali Marakkars of the Malabar coast were not always hostile. In fact, the Marakkars also relied on the support of the Portuguese. As coastal traders and suppliers, the Kunjali Marakkars always needed a stable group of overseas traders. The Portuguese, who had gained prominence over the Arab Al Karimi Traders, compelled the Marakkars to shift their dependency from the Arabs to the Portuguese. At one point, the Kunjali Marakkars even provided 1500 seamen to assist the Portuguese in confronting the Zamorins.

##### ◆ Rise if Cassados ◆ Issue related to Cassados

However, the Kunjali Marakkars and the Portuguese often clashed over seemingly different issues that were fundamentally rooted in economic rivalry. One of the more significant issues was the rise of the *Cassados*. The *Cassados* were the children of Portuguese men who had married local women. By the latter half of the sixteenth century, the *Cassados* had become an organized trading group on the Malabar Coast under Portuguese protection. The Kunjali Marakkars rebelled against the Portuguese when the *Cassados* started to undermine the Marakkars' monopoly in coastal trade at various locations. Consequently, the Marakkars fiercely opposed both the Portuguese and the *Cassados*. However, as was typical, this conflict eventually subsided through compromise driven by economic interests.

##### ◆ Tuhfat-ul-Mujahiddin on relationship between Kunjali's and Portuguese

At times, conflicts between the Marakkars and the Portuguese have been characterized as communal. It is believed that Kunjali Marakkars and many Muslim fishermen fought against the Portuguese in the spirit of *jihad* (the religious duty of fighting against non-believers). Islamic religious sentiments may have been utilized to strengthen the unity among Muslims. One notable contemporary source on this subject is *Tuhfat-ul-Mujahiddin*, a book written by Shaikh Zainuddin (c.1510–1583), an Islamic scholar from Ponnani. The book invokes Islamic solidarity by recounting the history of the Muslims in Malabar and emphasizing their hardships following the arrival of the Portuguese.



- ◆ *Ponnani lost to Kunjali*
- ◆ *Kottakkal became new centre*

The Kunjali Marakkars formed a formidable force that resisted Portuguese attempts to establish themselves on the Malabar Coast until the late sixteenth century. The first battle against the Portuguese took place at Ponnani, where the Marakkars were defeated. After their defeat at Ponnani, the Kunjali Marakkars regrouped and settled in Kottakkal, becoming known as the Kottakkal Kunjali Marakkars. However, as mentioned earlier, the Portuguese could not afford to have permanent enmity with the Kunjali Marakkars, who were their suppliers of goods.

- ◆ *Portuguese gained upper hand in trade after the murder of last Kunjali Marakkar*

While the Portuguese consistently fought against the Al Karimi Merchants as their rivals in the spice trade, they always reconciled with the Kunjali Marakkars, as their support was crucial in coastal transactions. The Portuguese aimed to consolidate their control over the overall trade activities on the Malabar Coast. They sought permission from the Zamorins to build forts at Chaliyam and Ponnani, but the Zamorins refused. The Kunjali Marakkars fiercely resisted the Portuguese's forceful attempt to construct a fort at Chaliyam. Due to the formidable attacks by the Marakkars, the Portuguese were unable to establish control over the Malabar Coast. However, during 1597-99, through the treacherous murder of the most assertive Kunjali Marakkar of that time, the Portuguese gained the upper hand. Paradoxically, it was the Zamorins who, seeking revenge for the humiliation they suffered, deceitfully trapped and handed over this Kunjali Marakkar to the Portuguese. By the end of the sixteenth century CE, the Portuguese had managed to establish themselves in strategic centers such as Kollam, Kochi, Kodungallur, Kozhikode, and Kannur by constructing forts.

### 4.2.3 Marthanda Varma and the Dutch

- ◆ *Tangacherry-commercial residence of Dutch*

As we discussed in the previous unit, the Dutch arrived on the Malabar Coast in Kerala in 1604. After expelling the Portuguese from Kerala, they established a trade monopoly with the princely states. Captain Nieuhoff was appointed as the Chief Director of the Fort and Factory. He arrived on January 7th, 1662, and immediately ordered the renovation of the old damaged fort of the Portuguese at Tangacherry. This fort became the commercial residence and transit camp of the Dutch in Quilon. In 1664, Captain Nieuhoff visited various chiefs in south and central Kerala, strengthening the Dutch position in the region. During this visit, the rulers of Kayamkulam, Purakkad, Marta, and Quilon entered into

agreements with him, granting the Dutch a monopoly on pepper trade and other trade privileges in their territories.

- ◆ *Nieuhoff and fortification of Quilon*

In May 1665, John Nieuhoff was instructed to prepare for the fortification of the City of Quilon on land with one well and two demibatisations. The foundations of the fortification were laid. The Dutch intended to use it as an outpost against foreigners, particularly the English merchants whose fort at Anjengo was located nearby.

- ◆ *Financial crisis*
- ◆ *Trade contract*

The Dutch faced challenges in terms of organization and financial resources to sustain their trade on the Malabar Coast. To cope with the expenses of maintaining their staff in various settlements, they implemented strict measures. They demolished most of the fortifications at Quilon, retaining only a minimal presence. Meanwhile, the market price of pepper increased due to the competition among the English, French, and the Dutch who were purchasing large quantities for their home markets. The ongoing wars in Europe further exacerbated the situation, leading to frustration for the Dutch. They had a small transit station at Tengapattanam in South Travancore, from where spices were collected and sent to Tuticorin for export to Ceylon. The Dutch attempted to enforce their contracts with different warring princes in the Travancore region, such as *Elayidathu Swarupam* (Kottarakara), Kayamkulam, and Chempakasseri, who were opposing Maharaja Marthanda Varma of Travancore.

- ◆ *1743- Treaty with Travancore*
- ◆ *Battle of Colachel*

Under the leadership of Maharaja Marthanda Varma, Travancore pursued a policy of subduing these rebellious factions and unifying the entire region into a powerful kingdom. This made the Dutch pepper trade challenging. In their desperation, the Dutch allied with the smaller principalities, which resulted in hostilities with Travancore. This conflict marked the beginning of the war between Travancore and the Dutch in 1741, culminating in the famous Battle of Colachel where the Dutch were defeated. To safeguard their trade, the Dutch decided to negotiate a peace treaty with Travancore. On May 22nd, 1743, an extensive treaty was concluded between Travancore and the Dutch with Reinicus Siersma, the new Dutch Commander leading the negotiations.

According to the terms of the treaty, both parties agreed to maintain peaceful and friendly relations in the future. They also agreed to exchange prisoners of war. Marthanda Varma committed to supplying the company with 1200 candies of



- ◆ *Exchange prisoners of war, gun powder, lead, muskets and flint*

pepper at a rate of rupees fifty-four per candy. In return, the company had to provide a pass for 200 candies of pepper as part of the contracted 1200 candies. Additionally, the company agreed to annually supply the King of Travancore with gunpowder, lead, muskets, and flints worth 100 candies of pepper. The Company was granted permission to trade in linen and other goods within the Kingdom of Travancore and other territories under the King's authority. They were also allowed to construct a fortified fort at Colachel and fireproof lodges at Kottar and Thengapattanam. The Company was obligated to assist the King in case of conflicts with the French or the forces of the Nawab of Carnatic. They were to remain neutral if the King of Travancore engaged in military action against the King of Kayamkulam. However, the treaty did not impose any restrictions on the expansion of Travancore's territory.

- ◆ *1753- Treaty of Mavelikara*
- ◆ *Neutrality in war*

The deep-rooted rivalry between the Dutch and the King of Travancore persisted. By 1745, it became evident that the King of Travancore was attempting to deceive the company by offering peace terms. Despite ongoing hostilities and skirmishes, in 1748, the Dutch and their allies were completely defeated. The Dutch then decided to enter into negotiations for a peace agreement, and on August 15, 1753, the Treaty of Mavelikara was signed with the King of Travancore. According to this treaty, the Dutch pledged not to obstruct Travancore's territorial expansion. This allowed Marthanda Varma to fulfill his ambition of a greater Travancore.

- ◆ *Mutual agreements*
- ◆ *Political withdrawal of Dutch*

Under the terms of the 1753 treaty, Marthanda Varma agreed to end his alliances with other European powers in order to establish an agreement with the Dutch East India Company. He allowed the Dutch to trade and reside within his kingdom. However, the English were to be left undisturbed in their settlements at Anjengo, Vizhinjam, and Edava. The king was not to provide any support or allow other European powers to establish a presence in his land. This arrangement aimed to prevent other European companies from entering Travancore. In exchange, the Dutch terminated their alliances with various rulers along the Kerala Coast, leaving Marthanda Varma to decide whether to engage in warfare with them. Essentially, it was a political retreat by the Dutch East India Company from the affairs of Kerala.

Trouble arose for the Dutch in Cochin and Malabar when Hyder Ali of Mysore invaded and took control of

- ◆ *Eve of Mysore invasion- Dutch sold their possessions in Kerala*

their territories, including forts and factories in Cochin. Recognizing the precariousness of their situation, the Dutch Governor in Cochin, M. Van Angelbeek, decided to sell all their lands and forts to the ruling houses of Travancore and Cochin. The Maharaja of Travancore authorized Dewan Kesava Pillai to negotiate with the Dutch Governor for the purchase of the Dutch Forts of Ayakotta and Cranganore. European trading companies sought to establish settlements in Kerala. After the Dutch gained power in Kerala in 1663, the English and French East India Companies faced significant challenges.

- ◆ *Dutch control from Colachel to Cape Comorin*

In the meantime, the Dutch forces stationed in Colachel decided to expand their control to the entire region, from Colachel to Cape Comorin. The Dutch commander of Cochin, Stein Van Gollennesse, strongly recommended taking military action. However, the Dutch forces faced challenges due to their limited resources. They couldn't receive assistance from Java because of the Dutch involvement in the war on the island.

- ◆ *Dutch force lost the battle*

Marthanda Varma seized the opportunity presented by the Dutch's difficulties and led a large force southwards to capture Colachel. The shortage of men to defend against the sizable army forced the Dutch commander to send a desperate plea to Ceylon for reinforcements and weapons. Upon hearing about the movement of Travancore forces towards Colachel, the Dutch forces grew alarmed. They retreated to the small fort and prepared for defense. The Travancore force besieged the fort, and the Dutch forces stationed at Cape Comorin were unable to break through the blockade. Their team was insufficient to face the enemy's 12,000 to 15,000 troops, and they were left to face their fate.

- ◆ *Tellicherry records- Dutch surrender to Marthanda Varma*

The Travancore forces tightened the siege, and on August 5, 1741, a burning hot ball from the Travancore forces accidentally hit the gunpowder barrel of the trapped Dutch forces in the Colachel Fort. A fire broke out, which lasted for two days. The flames consumed all their food supplies. Unable to endure further starvation, the Dutch forces surrendered to the King of Travancore. The English factory at Tellicherry recorded that the Dutch at Colachel surrendered to the King of Travancore. Thus, Marthanda Varma emerged victorious in the siege without assistance from the French and without engaging in battle. Many of the wars such as Colachel and the joint attacks of the Dutch and Malabar princes were won before De Lannoy had joined service in Travancore.



- ◆ Army trained in European model

When the kingdom expanded through conquests, Marthanda Varma recognized the importance of maintaining a permanent military force to ensure the safety and peace of the conquered provinces. He also understood that adopting European warfare tactics would increase the chances of victory. Hyder Ali and the Nizam of Hyderabad had already employed European generals. In 1742, the Dutch defeated six thousand men of the Travancore Army at Quilon, forcing them to retreat. This incident likely shocked Marthanda Varma and convinced him of the necessity of a standing army trained in the European style with European weapons to protect the country.

- ◆ Guidance of De Lannoy modernization process started

Finally, Marthanda Varma decided to establish a standing army under the guidance of De Lannoy, one of the prisoners captured in the Battle of Colachel. This marked the first time in Travancore's history that a standing army trained in the European model was formed. Marthanda Varma appointed Captain De Lannoy as the head of His Highness' Service to modernize the army. He recruited soldiers from various castes, including *Nairs*, *Nadars*, *Ezhavas*, and *Christians*. Marthanda Varma's conquests were achieved with the assistance of armies composed of his own subjects. The *Mathilakom* records also confirm that the majority of Marthanda Varma's army consisted of his own subjects. The elite soldiers were known as *Kunchukuttakkar*, selected from the Nair community. By recruiting soldiers from different classes, Marthanda Varma took the initial steps toward dismantling the traditional feudal army dominated by the Nair nobility. This move towards establishing a national army marked the beginning of the decline of Nair dominance.

- ◆ Western method of warfare
- ◆ Exchange pepper for arms and ammunition

De Lannoy provided instruction in Western warfare techniques. He was responsible for creating modern firearms such as swords, guns, and bullets for Travancore. He constructed the fort and ramparts of Puliyanurichi, as well as the arsenal located there. In October 1744, the King of Travancore received 150 weapons from the Anjengo Government. In December 1744, the Travancore Maharaja obtained 200 small arms from the English. Agreements were made between the authorities of the East India Company at Anjengo and the Maharaja to ensure the timely supply of gunpowder, flints, weapons, and ammunition. Accordingly, in 1744, the King of Travancore received 30 barrels of gunpowder and 2,000 flints. Each year, European weapons were provided to the Maharaja in exchange for pepper based on the requirements of the time. This consistent supply of

European arms facilitated the Europeanization of the army under De Lannoy's guidance.

◆ *Military arrangements*

Captain De Lannoy divided the entire Travancore into three regions: east, west, and south. He distributed the army proportionately across these regions. The headquarters of the army were located in Puliyanakurichi, where Captain De Lannoy resided. Reports were submitted to the Maharaja through the native head-commandant known as Valia Yejamanan. The main military bases were located in Padmanabhapuram, Trivandrum, and Quilon. The trained army consisted of infantry, cavalry, and artillery units. In addition to these divisions, there was also the traditional militia known as Pullipattalam, which included 72 battalions of 200 men each, including the artillery. Therefore, Marthanda Varma's army combined both modern and traditional elements as well as regular and irregular forces.

◆ *Europeanisation of army led to the decline of Nair dominance in Thiruvitamkur*

The national army of the country was the regular army, which was trained in modern warfare techniques, while the irregular army followed the old system of warfare. However, greater importance was given to the regular army. Marthanda Varma maintained a regular army equipped with traditional weapons to utilize the men trained in the Kalaris and their combat experience. The majority of soldiers in the regular army were Nairs, allowing them to retain military superiority. Nevertheless, the authority of Nair chieftains and feudal leaders declined. Thus, the decline of Nair dominance began during the reign of Marthanda Varma, leading to the weakening of the Feudal System of Society. According to Robbin Jeffery, "De Lannoy reorganized the military, transforming it from a feudal force under local chiefs to a salaried, disciplined, and unified army. The army primarily consisted of Nairs, and their militia was not abolished. However, the new army represented a further encroachment on the independence of local Nair leaders." "No community in Southern Kerala was more impacted by Marthanda Varma's campaigns and policies than the Nairs." Consequently, the Europeanization of the army resulted in the liberation of the country from feudalism and the emancipation of the Nairs from their traditional obligation of compulsory military service under their feudal lords.

From 1746 to 1750, the Travancore ruler ruled the Elayadathu *Swarupam*, Attingal, Kayamkulam, Purakkad, Tekkumkur, and Vadakkumkur, much to the dismay of the Dutch. Marthanda Varma's actions shattered the Dutch



- ◆ *Marthanda Varma shattered the dream of Dutch to conquer Kerala*

dream of conquering Kerala. It should be noted that Marthanda Varma's conquests absorbed the important Dutch establishments at Quilon, Marta, Kayamkulam, and Purakkad into the kingdom of Travancore, significantly weakening the Dutch position.

## Summarised Overview

The relationship between the Zamorin and the Portuguese was not cordial from the beginning. The Portuguese aimed to establish a trade monopoly on the Kerala coast, but their ambitions were thwarted by the Zamorin and local merchants, particularly Kunjali Marakkar. As a result, the Portuguese formed friendly relations with Cochin, Quilon, and Kolathunadu which helped them achieve their trade goals. Meanwhile, these powers along with the Portuguese sought to resist Zamorin's invasion while the Portuguese seized the opportunity to establish a monopoly on trade, especially in spices.

In 1498, Vasco da Gama was warmly welcomed by the Zamorin, but the Zamorin did not accept their trade-related demands. This led to resentment among the Portuguese, and Kolathiri took advantage of the situation by welcoming and facilitating trade with the Portuguese. During Vasco da Gama's second visit, he had conflicts with local merchants in Calicut and violently attacked them. In response to native counterattacks, he had to flee to Cochin. The trade relationship between Cochin and the Portuguese strengthened through trade treaties. Although these treaties were humiliating, the Cochin Raja, driven by trade and political ambitions, did not protest against them.

The growing relations between Cochin, other princely states, and the Dutch alarmed the Zamorin, who requested Cochin to expel the Portuguese. However, the Raja of Cochin rejected this demand. When the Zamorin attacked Cochin, Cochin resisted with the help of the Portuguese. The Zamorin sought assistance from Arabs and the Egyptian fleet, but their efforts were in vain. Eventually, a treaty was concluded between the Portuguese and the Zamorin, granting permission for pepper trade in Calicut. The relationship worsened after the Portuguese murdered Marakkar.

The relationship between Kunjali Marakkar and the Zamorin was not always hostile. Their conflicts mainly revolved around economic issues. The emergence of the *Cassados*, an organized trading group under Portuguese protection, created conflicts with the Portuguese. Kunjali Marakkar formed a formidable force that resisted Portuguese power from the 16th century onwards. Kunjali Marakkar and the natives fiercely resisted the Portuguese attempt to build a fort at Chaliyam.

During the time of Kunjali IV, the relationship between Kunjali and the Zamorin deteriorated. Kunjali IV proclaimed himself as the Sultan of the Malabar Coast and humiliated the Zamorin on multiple occasions. The Zamorin, with the support of the Portuguese trapped Kunjali and despite the Zamorin's demand not to kill him, the Portuguese brutally murdered him. Consequently, the Portuguese gained the upper hand in the Malabar Coast.

After the succession of Marthanda Varma, Travancore became the most powerful princely state. Marthanda Varma eliminated feudal elements and expanded the kingdom by annexing neighboring regions. During this period, the Dutch aimed to expand south of Cochin to monopolize the pepper trade. Marthanda Varma, driven by his ambition for the pepper trade, conducted expansions along the trade route, leading to conflicts with the Dutch.

Encounters took place at Kayamkulam and then proceeded to Thengapattanam, Eraniyal, and finally reached Padmanabhapuram Palace. Marthanda Varma's forces defeated the Dutch in the famous Battle of Colachel on July 31, 1741, marking the first defeat of a European power on Asian soil. After the Colachel war, Dutch captain De Lannoy and Dona de were given high positions in the Travancore army, with De Lannoy becoming the chief captain or Valiya Kappithan, and Dona de serving as his trusted advisor and commander.

## Self Assessment

1. In which year the Portuguese captured and fortified Cranganore?
2. Name the work of Sheikh Zainuddin which provides detailed information of the history of the Mussalmans of Malabar in the Portuguese period.
3. Who were Al Karimi merchants?
4. What do you know about John Nieuwhoff?
5. Discuss the modernisation process under De Lannoy
6. When was the Battle of Colachel fought?
7. Write briefly about the Treaty of Mavelikkara.
8. Name the head quarter of Travancore army during the period of De Lannoy.
9. What was *Pullipattalam*?
10. Name the English record mentioned about the battle of Colachel



## Assignments

1. Discuss the role of Kunjali Marakkars in the early resistance against the Portuguese in Kerala.
2. Trace the relation of Portuguese with Cochin.
3. Examine the importance of the battle of Colachel.
4. Bring out the nature of relation between Zamorin and Portuguese.
5. Discuss how the Portuguese established their monopoly of trade in Kerala.

## Suggested Readings

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## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

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# Mysore Invasions and Socio-Political Changes

## Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ examine various interpretations related to Mysore invasion
- ◆ identify the circumstances that led to the Mysore invasion
- ◆ summarize the invasion of Hyder Ali
- ◆ evaluate the revenue system introduced by Tipu Sultan

## Background

Political disunity prevailed in Kerala and worsened with the arrival of Portuguese and other European powers. The Zamorin's ambition to expand his kingdom and establish supremacy over the other chieftains was shattered by the Portuguese. The Portuguese effectively exploited the rivalries among princely states. In this unit, we examine the Mysore invasion in Kerala's history, prioritizing the political invasion of Hyder Ali and his policies. The revenue policy of Tipu Sultan is a crucial aspect of this unit, and we also focus on the impact of the Mysore invasion in Kerala.

## Keywords

Mysore, Tipu Sultan, Hyder Ali, Zamorin, Arakkal, Revenue, Ryots, English East India Company



## Discussion

### 4.3.1 Historiography

#### ◆ Works on Mysore invasion

The primary sources of information on the Mysorean invasions are the official records of the English East India Company. The Tellicherry Consultations shed light on the interactions between the Zamorin of Calicut and the English East India Company from 1725 to 1751. They also describe internal events, the Zamorin's relations with the Dutch, and the Mysorean invasions of Kerala before 1756. The Report of the Joint Commissioners (1783) provides an account of events in Malabar during the first year of English occupation and some preceding events. The *Granthavaris* of Kozhikode offer valuable information regarding Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan. The Thalasseri Documents make reference to the King of Chirakkal capturing Rantuthara in Kottunadu in 1779-80 on Tipu's instructions. The Pazhassi Documents also provide information about Tipu Sultan's invasions. According to the Pazhassi Documents of 1796, Kadathanattu Porlathiri Godavarma agreed in writing to surrender Wayanad to Tipu Sultan. Several letters of correspondence provide details about Tipu, such as a letter by Kanagovi Bavarian addressed to James Stevens, which sheds light on the friendship between Tipu Sultan and the Pazhassi King. Francis Buchanan, in his work '*A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore,*' provides comprehensive accounts of the early history of the Malabar Kingdoms, as well as the political, social, and economic conditions prevailing in Malabar during his visit in 1800-1801 under the orders of Lord Wellesley, the Governor-General of India.

#### ◆ Highlighted Tipu's religious policy

Francis Day's *The Land of the Perumals* and Samuel Mateer's *The Land of Charity and Native Life in Travancore* offer information about Cochin and Travancore in the 19th century. William Logan presents sensational stories and regular accounts of pilgrims, providing steady insights into the Hindus who were killed and converted by Tipu Sultan. The numerous treaties and correspondence related to Malabar, arranged and published by William Logan in his valuable work *A Collection of Treaties: Engagements and other papers of importance relating to British affairs in Malabar* enrich the source material for the British period.

In his work *The Zamorins of Calicut*, K.V. Krishna Iyer addresses the issue of conversion during Tipu Sultan's



- ◆ Works on the effect of Mysore invasion on trade

reign. Ashin Das Gupta, in *Malabar in Asian Trade*, concludes that the invasion and intervention of Mysorean powers in Malabar were the primary causes of the collapse of trading enterprises. K. Madhavan Nair, a veteran nationalist leader, asserts in *Malabar Kalapam* that Tipu's invasion of Malabar and his proselytization projects were the main factors behind the 1921 revolt. According to N. Rajendran's *Shifting Balance of Pepper Trade in the late Eighteenth Century*, the turmoil following Tipu Sultan's brutal reprisals against Hindu rebels significantly affected pepper cultivation in Malabar. Most of these works focus on the religious attitudes of the Mysore rulers.

- ◆ Different views regarding Mysore invasion

On the other hand, a group of historians emerged with different perspectives. C. K. Kareem, A. P. Ibrahim Kunju, and others primarily took a defensive stance against the rulers of Mysore. They argued that both pilgrim and patriot scholars did not examine the true factors and claimed to have shed light on numerous other aspects of these rulers. Despite colonialist writers frequently emphasizing religious sentiment as the main cause, a rarely cited contemporary record provides a more logical and novel perspective on the Mysorean invasion of Malabar. *Vellayude Charitram*, a Malayalam Chronicle on Hyder's invasion of Kerala by N. M. Namputiri, reveals that Hyder, despite his military credentials, had to demonstrate his strength as a warrior and gather resources through invasions and raids. Hyder was able to assert that he had added territory significantly larger than the initial dominions of Mysore that the Raja had ruled over, thanks to his acquisitions in Malabar and conquests in the north.

- ◆ Opened discussions on the reforms introduced by Tipu

*Nawab Tipu Sultan* by K. K. N. Kurup is a study that provides historical evidence to refute criticism and malicious propaganda directed at Tipu Sultan, as well as an overview of the ruler's life. Thus, the historiography opened discussions regarding the Mysore invasion and the reforms introduced by Tipu in Malabar. P. K. Balakrishnan, in *Tipu Sultan*, made sincere efforts to question and understand the events that occurred in Malabar during the Mysore attack. He portrays Tipu Sultan as a wise ruler who showed kindness to his non-Muslim subjects.

In *Kerala under Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan*, Kareem argues that Tipu Sultan was a compassionate and non-sectarian ruler. He states that the moral and social progress of his subjects was the core of Tipu's kingship and his entire life.

- ◆ Denounce Tipu's communal nature

Velayudhan Panikkassery, in *Kerala Charithram*, also criticise Tipu Sultan's sectarian nature. In his book *Tipu Sultan*, V. Kunhikrishnan portrays Tipu Sultan's life, emphasizing his benevolent and effective leadership qualities. He disputes the tales of widespread conversions and temple destruction as fabrications. P. Chinnaian critically examines both sides of the argument and praises Tipu as a great prince of Medieval India, supported by historical evidence, in his book *Tipu Sultan the Great*.

- ◆ Covers period from 1780-1805

A recent work on this subject is *From Contact to Triumph: Progress to English Rule in Malabar 1790-1805* by German researcher Margaret Frenz. The book is divided into six sections and covers a wide range of topics from the social order prior to colonialism to the transition to colonial administration in Malabar. Although the book focuses on the period from 1790 to 1805, the author adeptly explores issues such as the wars involving the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British, as well as the Mysore rulers' invasion of Malabar. Thus, the historiography has sparked discussions regarding the Mysore invasion and the reforms introduced in Malabar.

### 4.3.2 Hyder Ali, Tipu Sultan and Political Conflict

- ◆ More opportunity to English East India Company

Mysore-Kerala relations in the second half of the 18th century have been a subject of intense controversy. It was a crucial period in the history of South India. The tumultuous situation in the region presented an enticing opportunity for ambitious chieftains to vie for power in the southern realm. The Carnatic and Mysore, the two prominent kingdoms in the area, were both grappling with political turmoil and economic decline. The initial military invasion of Mysore in Kerala took place in Malabar, encompassing the territories of the Zamorins of Calicut, led by Hyder Ali. This invasion provided the English East India Company with more opportunities to strengthen their control over the ancient feudal principalities of Malabar and to forge a secure alliance with Travancore which came under attack by the Mysore Sultans after Cochin. The Mysore invasion brought about far-reaching changes in the economic and political landscapes.

Mysore's formidable military power, capable of striking from Mysore into North Malabar or breaching the southern boundary from Tirunelveli, instilled fear in the *Swarupams* of Kerala. Even the Kingdom of Venad, located further south from Malabar, lived in constant apprehension of Mysore.



- ◆ *Mysore invasion-fear among the Swarupams*
- ◆ *Anxiety and insecurity*

These incursions by the Mysore Army into Kerala should be understood in the context of the longstanding rivalry between Mysore and the Marathas. Whenever the Maratha threat subsided, Hyder Ali would invade Malabar, and when hostilities with the Marathas resumed, he would withdraw his forces from Malabar and redeploy them to counter the Marathas. Thus, these sporadic and unpredictable attacks created a sense of insecurity and unease among the kings and ruling families of Kerala. The frustration of the Zamorins is evident in the following statement from Granthavari: "Despite our full adherence to the instructions of the Portuguese King, it is impossible to live in peace anywhere in the country."

- ◆ *The disunity among local rulers paved the way for Mysore invasion*

The primary objective of the Mysorean army appeared to be the replenishment of their supplies. Regrettably, the local rulers themselves had paved the way for it. For instance, the Zamorins consistently harassed the Palakkad Tarur *Swarupam* and extracted as much as they could in terms of money and goods. In 1756-57, the Zamorins attacked Palakkad. Prior to this assault, they had already subdued Valluvanadu and expanded their control up to Nedumangad. Then their focus shifted to Palakkad, where they seized Naduvattom. As a result, the Tarur ruling family experienced internal divisions. To escape the clutches of Punthurakkon (Zamorin), the head of the Palakkad ruling family, Komi Achan, sought assistance from Mysore. In exchange, Mysore demanded an annuity of 12,000 panam which Komi Achan agreed to. During these conflicts, Hyder Ali (1720-1782 CE) served as the military commander of the Mysorean Army stationed at Dindigul.

- ◆ *The double gain-from Zamorin and Palakkad*
- ◆ *Jagir to Hyder Ali by Mysore Raja*

Following the orders of the Maharaja of Mysore, Hyder Ali sent a large battalion under Makhdam Ali to Palakkad. Upon learning of this, the Zamorins chose not to engage in a confrontation with the Mysorean Army and instead brokered peace by agreeing to make a lump sum payment of twelve lakh rupees to the King of Mysore. This victory enhanced Hyder Ali's reputation and encouraged him to launch attacks on other minor kingdoms in Kerala. These kingdoms had amassed wealth through trade with foreign merchants. Delighted with Hyder Ali's successful checkmate of the Zamorins and the substantial payment secured, the King of Mysore rewarded him with a Jagir (a grant of revenue rights along with the responsibility of maintaining military contingents).

### 4.3.2.1 Hyder Ali's Campaigns

- ◆ Hyder Ali-1761-  
became ruler of  
Mysore
- ◆ Invasion to  
Mysore

The Zamorins, however, failed to fulfill their promised payment, which greatly angered the King of Mysore. Meanwhile, Hyder Ali, who was gaining power and influence, overthrew the King of Mysore and took control of the administration by 1761 CE. He once again demanded money from the Zamorins, but when they refused, Hyder Ali marched his army to Malabar. The Zamorins initially attempted to confront the Mysore Army at Kolattunadu but had to retreat. They put up a strong resistance at Katathanadu, but were eventually defeated by the Mysore Army and pushed further south. The Zamorins' efforts to counter the enemy forces at Kottakkatavil also proved unsuccessful. Finally, the Hyder Ali Army reached Kozhikode and set up their camp outside the southeast corner of the *Kovilakam* (the Royal Quarters). The area where the Mysore Army camped is still known as *Palayam* (Military Camp). To the east of the main palace was its subsidiary, *Kilakke Kovilakam*, which encompassed the present-day *Thaleppalayam* and *Chinthavalappu*. This was the residence of Eralppad, the heir to the throne, and other important members of the royal family.

- ◆ Zamorin killed  
himself
- ◆ Hyder stationed  
Raza Ali and  
Mathanna

Due to the dangerous proximity of Hyder Ali's Military Camp to the main *Kovilakam*, plans were made to relocate women and children to safer places in the south. All the residents of *Kilakke Kovilakam* were sent to Ponnani. Manorama Thampuratty, who would later become a renowned Sanskrit scholar, was still a child and was among those who were moved to secure quarters. Hyder Ali's military besieged the *Kovilakam* and cut off the supply of essential goods. Left with no choice, the Zamorins sought reconciliation. Hyder Ali now demanded a purse of 10 million gold coins, a sum that the Zamorins were unable to raise. On April 27, 1765, the Zamorins locked themselves in the armory and detonated it, resulting in their own deaths and the complete destruction of the palace. Hyder Ali stationed two of his men at Kozhikode, Raza Ali to oversee military operations and Mathanna to collect taxes and then withdrew to Coimbatore via Palakkad. Along the way, there were uprisings by the local people against Hyder Ali's military march. Hyder Ali suppressed these rebellions, but suffered heavy losses as a result. In 1766 CE, he led the army in a counter-offensive against the Nadir Troops at Puthiyangadi of Vettathunatu.

Although the Zamorin had become a formidable force in terms of manpower, weaponry, and military strategy, their



- ◆ The expansionist policies of Zamorin failed

expansionist policies proved unsuccessful. Their rivalry with the Perumpadappu *Swarupam* and conflicts with the English, along with the military raids by the Kings of Mysore, contributed to their failures. It is also worth noting that the new generation of Royal Kinsmen from the *Nileswaram Kovilakam* lacked experience, although they were unwilling to admit it. The induction of kinsmen from other royal houses through adoption was a common practice among the Tiruvitamkur, Perumpadappu, Zamorins, and Kolathiri *Kovilakams*. The minister of the royal militia, Mangattachan, and other high-ranking officials treated these new additions through adoption as separate from the existing power structure, leading to friction between the royalty and the cabinet. Consequently, the royalty increasingly relied on advisors who had accompanied them from *Nileswaram*.

- ◆ Conclusion of 1766 battle

After the conclusion of the battle in 1766, members of the *Kilakke Kovilakam* returned and occupied *Venkittakkotta*, which was previously acquired from the *Kottakkal Vellattiri*. According to the story, *Venkittakkotta* was previously occupied by *Montambalathu Moose*, a military leader under *Vellattiri*. *Moose* conspired and killed the Zamorins' military leader, *Tenayancheri Elayathu*. In retaliation, the *Eralpad*, acting under the Zamorins' instructions, killed *Moose*, and *Venkittakkotta* fell into the possession of the Zamorins, who established it as the new *Kilakke Kovilakam*. Subsequently, the Zamorins expelled several of *Hyder Ali's* tax collectors and military leaders, reclaiming portions of the lost territory.

- ◆ Arakkal and Chirakkal dynasties sided with Hyder Ali

For various reasons, the *Arakkal* and *Chirakkal* dynasties aligned themselves with *Hyder Ali*. Since *Hyder Ali's* capture of *Bikaner* in 1763, the *Arakkal* Royalty maintained diplomatic relations with *Mysore*. *Arakkal's* main objective was to persuade *Hyder Ali* to invade *Chirakkal*, whereas the *Chirakkal* royalty wanted *Hyder Ali* to confront the English. In 1767, *Hyder Ali* marched from *Mysore* to *Kodungalloor*, with plans to attack *Venad* that did not come to fruition. In 1773, a large battalion led jointly by *Sayyid Sahib*, *Hyder Ali's* favored commander, and *Srinivasa Rao*, a powerful commander of *Mysore*, arrived via *Thamarassery Pass*. They engaged in looting and plundering the captured regions, resulting in *Mysore* gaining control over many parts of *Malabar*.

In 1776, *Hyder Ali* made another attempt to invade *Venad*. This was to settle a score as *Venad* had provided refuge to refugees from *Malabar*. Additionally, *Hyder Ali*

- ◆ *Attempt to invade Venad*
- ◆ *English and Dutch stop their progress towards Venad*

sought to recover at least a portion of the expenses incurred during his Malabar Campaign in the previous decade. He demanded that the ruler of Venad pay a sum of 15 lakh rupees to avoid war. In response, the ruler of Venad proposed that if Hyder Ali returned the captured territories to their rightful owners, he would consider the demand. Hyder Ali marched towards Venad, and the Thrissur and Kotunkolur Koyilakams surrendered. Cochin *Kovilakam* secured peace and subsidiary status by offering four lakh rupees and 10 elephants. Cochin also facilitated the passage of the Mysore Army to Venad. However, the Dutch hindered Hyder Ali's plans. They attacked Kotunkolur *Kovilakam* and resisted the advance of the Mysore Army. Furthermore, the English made it challenging for Hyder Ali to proceed. Although the French volunteered to assist Hyder Ali, their efforts were in vain. As a result, Hyder Ali abandoned his plans to invade Venad and directed his anger towards the English.

- ◆ *1782-English East India Company captured territories under Mysore*

The Thalasseri Documents briefly mention that in 1779-80, the King of Chirakkal captured Rantuthara in Kottunadu on instructions from Tipu Sultan (1750-1799 CE). From 1780 onwards, Hyder Ali conducted offensives against the Dutch and the English. In 1782, during the confrontation with the English forces led by Major Abington, Hyder Ali's military leader, Sardar Khan, sustained fatal injuries, was captured, and died shortly afterward. Consequently, several territories previously captured by Sardar Khan, including Palakkad, Dharmadam, Mahe, and Nettur, came under the control of the English East India Company. The company forces also seized a substantial amount of cannons and other firearms.

- ◆ *English East India Company aided Zamorin*
- ◆ *Most of territories lost*

In Kerala, Mysore could only retain one territory known as Palakkattuseri. The regiment led by Makhdum Ali, stationed at Palakkattuseri, advanced to Chavakkad and successfully captured it. They then proceeded north to Kozhikode. On February 13, 1782, the English forces marched from Thalasseri to Kozhikode in support of the Zamorins. The English regiment, led by Abington and Colonel Humberstone, took control of the city and the fort. They launched a counter-attack against the Mysore Forces, pursuing Makhdum Ali and his regiment, who had set up camp at Thrikkalayur. Makhdum Ali eventually retreated to Ponnani, with Humberstone following closely behind. However, heavy rains forced Humberstone to retreat back to Kozhikode. Although he later resumed his campaign, the situation had changed by then. Hyder Ali had returned to Srirangapattanam and entrusted



the regiment at Palakkattusseri to his son, Tipu Sultan. On December 7, 1782, Hyder Ali passed away unexpectedly, which required Tipu Sultan to return to Srirangapattanam and assume power.

#### 4.3.2.2 Tipu Sultan's Campaign

Tipu Sultan continued the military expeditions of the Mysore Army in Malabar. His officers set up camps in Malabar to assess and collect taxes. However, the people of Malabar did not recognize Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan as their legitimate rulers, resulting in unpaid taxes accumulating over time. There were additional challenges as well. Hyder Ali had not transitioned from a military leader to an administrative head, and the society lacked a well-established revenue system or policy. As a result, tax collection often involved looting and plundering. Recognizing this issue, Tipu Sultan, as a competent administrator, implemented measures to survey the land, classify it, determine its yield, and impose fair taxes accordingly.

- ◆ *Tipu Sultan made arrangements for estimate and impose revenue and collect taxes*

The landlords strongly opposed the heavy dues and feared losing their properties. They instigated settlers and peasants to resist the tax imposition. In 1789 CE, Tipu Sultan responded with full military force, leading to devastating raids in Malabar characterized by looting, plundering, arson, and massacres. Forced religious conversions also occurred in some cases. However, Tipu Sultan's primary goal as an administrator was to establish an effective tax collection process.

- ◆ *Revenue arrangements-landlords resist against Tipu Sultan*

The military raids created a sense of insecurity and fear among the local population, regardless of their social status, caste, or religion. The army would enter private homes and public institutions, freely looting and burning them. As a result, members of the royal house of Chirakkal, landlords, and commoners sought refuge in distant southern territories to ensure their safety.

- ◆ *Military raids created insecurity*

One of Tipu Sultan's regiments, led by Srinivasarayar, marched northward from Palakkad, passing through Mankara and Cherpulassery, and arrived in Kozhikode. They set up camp south of the new *Kovilakam*. The new Zamorins attempted various strategies to resist Tipu's attack. They sought assistance from the French outpost at Mahe. Comte du Prath, the Officer-in-Charge at Mahe, sympathized with the Zamorins and provided whatever help he could. He even offered to lend a battalion from

- ◆ *Zamorin failed to get the help of French*

the French Army. However, this was not feasible due to the French alliance with Tipu Sultan. Consequently, Comte du Prath's superiors strongly opposed the idea and eventually recalled him. The Zamorins raised French flags in Kozhikode to exploit Tipu Sultan's friendship with the French, but the Sultan remained steadfast.

- ◆ 1770s- compelled English to end the war with Tipu-peace established

Meanwhile, the English East India Company faced a dual challenge. Continuous wars had depleted the company's profits, and sluggish trade further contributed to abysmally low earnings. The financial crisis in the 1770s compelled the English to seek peace and end the war with Tipu Sultan and the French. Moreover, the power dynamics in Europe had also shifted, leading to peace negotiations between the English and the French. During the ongoing peace talks with Tipu Sultan, the English attempted covert operations to destroy his military camps.

- ◆ 1782-English agreement Arakkal Beevi
- ◆ Treaty with Tipu and English

Arakkal Beevi, a prominent figure in Northern Kerala, was a close ally of Mysore. In December 1782, the English forces led by General Macleod subdued Arakkal Beevi and imprisoned her. She was compelled to sign an agreement that obligated the Arakkal family to pay an annual indemnity of 1.5 lakh rupees and an additional annuity of one lakh rupees to the Bombay province. Meanwhile, Tipu Sultan was still engaged in warfare. Eventually, the English were prepared to negotiate a treaty, but Tipu and his ministers were unwilling to compromise. Tipu insisted on having sovereignty over the rulers of Malabar, who had long been allies of the English. Succumbing to the pressure, the English abandoned their allies to the mercy of Tipu Sultan. Later, General Macleod of the English would regret, stating, "Hastily pursuing peace while deserting our allies who fought alongside us will be seen as a poor policy." The peace treaty stipulated that the English would control North Malabar while Tipu would have authority over South Malabar. General Macleod withdrew his army from Arakkal. Although there were uprisings against Tipu in various locations, he swiftly suppressed them.

- ◆ Fullerton and Tipu Conflict

On November 14, 1783, Colonel Fullerton subdued Palakkattuseri and captured the fort. The officials of the East India Company in London directed the company to agree to an armistice with Tipu and restore all the captured properties and territories. However, claiming that Tipu had violated the conditions of the treaty, Fullerton refused to return the fort and instead handed it over to the Zamorins. Nevertheless, Tipu's forces defeated the Zamorins and recaptured the fort.



within a few days.

- ◆ *Pazhassi documents-surrender of Wayanad to Tipu by Godavarma*

An entry in the Pazhassi Documents, dated December 2nd, 1796, provides a summary of the events at this point. In 1783 CE, under the instructions of Tipu Sultan, Arshad Beg Khan controlled the Hilly territories. Kadathanattu Porlathiri Godavarma, in written agreement, surrendered Wayanad to Tipu Sultan. In return, the Sultan agreed to grant Godavarma a Jagir worth 15,000 rupees. However, by the time the agreement was finalized in 1785, Wayanad had already lost its possession under Godavarma's rule.

- ◆ *1788-well-planned Malabar invasion*
- ◆ *The refugees from Malabar were given asylum by Travancore*

In 1788, in preparation for a planned invasion of Malabar, Tipu Sultan invaded Iruvainadu and subdued Kurungottu Nair. During this campaign, Tipu targeted ports and roads along the way, seeking complete control over the Malabar Coast from Chirakkal to Dharmadam, including strategic ports and roads. Arakkal Beevi sought assistance from the English. Dharmadam changed hands between the Kolattiri and the English a few times, but in 1789, the English reclaimed it. The Kolathiri sided with Tipu Sultan and invited him to Kannur. Tipu's forces advanced into North Malabar, causing the local population to flee southward. Once again, the ruler of Venad provided refuge to the refugees. This action angered Tipu, as he had set his sights on Venad's Pich Treasury and trade. However, the English offered strong resistance. Even Cochin, which had been traditionally subjected to bullying, aligned with Venad this time. On December 20, 1789, Tipu invaded one of Venad's strongholds, Nedungotta. Nevertheless, the English forces compelled Tipu to retreat. Tipu then shifted his focus to Kozhikode, where his large battalion caused widespread destruction. The city and its surroundings were set ablaze, resulting in numerous casualties and injuries.

- ◆ *1792- Treaty of Seringapattanam-Mysore dominance ended*

In December 1790, the English recaptured Kozhikode. Colonel James Hartley's regiment inflicted significant casualties on Tipu's army at Tirurangadi. The same success was achieved by Robert Abercromby at Kannur. Despite making peace with the French in Europe, the English had to engage in a conflict with them in India due to their alliance with Tipu. The English obstructed French ships at Mangalapuram and the transportation of weapons and supplies to Mysore by land. This severely undermined Mysore's military strategy. Finally, in 1792, with the signing of the Treaty of Srirangapatnam, the dominance of Mysore came to an end. As per the provisions of the treaty, Malabar,

Salem, Bellary, and Anantapur were annexed to the Madras Presidency. In a letter written in August 1795 by a private citizen named Chulali Kelappa Nambiar, it is mentioned that in 1788-89, after Tipu's forces devastated the area, a general from Bengal arrived with his regiment, pursued Tipu to Srirangapatnam, defeated him, and then returned to Kannur.

#### 4.3.2.3 Wayanad's Trauma

Tipu Sultan persisted in relentlessly attacking Wayanad until the end of his life. The people of Wayanad had to endure immense hardship during this period. The evidence of this trauma in Wayanad is found in the letters and petitions preserved in the Thalasseri records. In a private correspondence dated September 6, 1797, it is mentioned that Tipu's soldiers rounded up and captured both cattle and people. Another letter, dated September 9th, 1797, written by King Kurumporainatu Viravarma and addressed to Christopher Peile, the deputy superintendent of the Thalassery Factory of the East India Company, highlights the threatening presence of Tipu's soldiers in the vicinity. In a subsequent letter, dated September 30th, he described the frequent and relentless attacks by Tipu's army on Wayanad. On June 28th, 1798, he wrote to James Stevens, the Superintendent of the Thalassery Factory, expressing how Tipu's raids had brought immeasurable suffering to both Brahmanas and ordinary citizens. In the letter, he expressed gratitude to the English for defeating Tipu and restoring order. He also mentioned the execution of two royal men (*Tampurans*) and the captivity of the royal women (*Tampurattis*). In a petition submitted in the same year, a person named Kachirayan claimed that during Tipu's raids, many people were forced to flee and abandon their homes.

◆ *Tipu's interference in Wayanad had been recollected from various documents*

#### 4.3.2.4 Consequences of Tipu's Campaigns

Tipu Sultan's military raids had a significant impact on the social fabric of the entire Kerala coast, especially in Malabar. Like any army raid, Tipu's forays resulted in heavy loss of life and property. Territorial chieftains and landlords were looted and killed, often leading to arson. There were instances of religious conversion and plundering of temple property. References in *Granthavari* directly mention such incidents, citing the ransacking of places like Etattara, Koliyati, and Desom by Tipu's troops under Sardar Ahmed in 1790 and under Saikatpatty Sardar in 1791. Men were

◆ *Tipu's invasion affected the social fabric of the entire Kerala*



taken as prisoners or killed, cattle were stolen, and grains, including seeds, were looted. Wayanad and its surrounding areas were among the places that were set on fire.

- ◆ No proper land assessment, taxation on the eve of Mysore invasion
- ◆ Tipu's objective-effective revenue collection

Superior weapons and strategic warfare played a role in achieving victory in war and consolidating power. Tipu was not only a skilled administrator but his military campaigns can also be seen as interventions of an administrator. During Tipu's time, Malabar consisted of various independent territories such as Kurumporainadu, Vettattunadu, Chirakkal, and Arakkal. None of these territories had a well-developed administrative system. There was a lack of a strong ruler, centralized administration, rule of law, and a sustainable revenue recovery process in these native states of Malabar. Even Kozhikode, governed by the Zamorins and considered one of the best, lacked such structures. In the predominantly agrarian society, where the upper caste had rights over the produce, the feudalistic and hereditary zamindari system prevailed. Feudal lords could demand cash or kind in various ways, such as *ankam* (mandatory tax for resolving disputes through duels), *cunkam* (a type of Octroi), *Ela* (payments from confiscated property), *Kola* (bribe), *Vali* (permission fee), *Pizha* (fine), and so on. However, there was no proper documentation for these sums as the concept of taxation was virtually non-existent. Tipu Sultan took advantage of this chaotic environment to introduce and establish an effective revenue collection system, aiming to set up a well-functioning administrative process.

- ◆ Administrative reforms

Till then, the regime had been unregulated, and the territorial rulers and Zamindars held sovereignty over the land, its people, and its resources. They would act as friends or enemies depending on the situation. To establish a centralized and regulated administrative system, it was necessary to suppress or eliminate the territorial lords and Zamindars. This is exactly what Tipu Sultan did. Many landlords and Zamindars fled to Venad during his campaigns, and some were captured or killed. Tipu also aimed to eliminate the Nair regiments that were loyal to their lords. As the upper castes claimed exclusive rights over the produce and resources, Tipu dared to claim similar rights. He laid the foundation for a centralized administration, which required additional measures such as revenue assessment, systematic appropriation, officials, defense systems, markets, and roads to function efficiently. Tipu assessed the land's fertility and crop yield to impose a proportional tax and ensure regular tax collection.

- ◆ *Protection of ports and markets*
- ◆ *Roads constructed for trade and commerce*

To promote trade, Tipu implemented measures to protect ports and markets. He stationed armed men at all ports and marked them to maintain peace and order during transactions. He also developed wharfs and dockyards in Ponnani and Beypore. Feroke was transformed into a market town with improved infrastructure under Tipu's initiatives. His troops also constructed several important roads connecting resource centers with ports and markets. The main route linking Malabar to Mysore through the Wayanad pass was upgraded to facilitate the movement of soldiers and artillery under Tipu's rule. Most roads were constructed for both commercial and defense purposes. Tipu established a state monopoly on commodities like coconut, pepper, sandalwood, tobacco, and teak. During this time, Malabar witnessed the emergence of a modern state with organized revenue administration, trade policies, defense systems, and infrastructure development.

- ◆ *Tipu couldn't tolerate the evil practices*

In Kerala during that period, practices like polyandry, polygamy, untouchability, and social exclusion existed. Tipu Sultan, being a moralist, was shocked by these unpleasant practices and couldn't tolerate the uncultured habits of the people. He urged them to embrace purity, chastity, and civilization by abandoning their old customs and practices. Although he led a liberal lifestyle, he wanted people to follow his example.

- ◆ *Abolished polyandry*
- ◆ *Feroke- new town*

One of Tipu Sultan's significant reforms was the abolition of the polyandry system among upper-caste Hindus. He also implemented a prohibition on intoxicants throughout his kingdom. Furthermore, he encouraged people to dress modestly as both men and women would often be partially naked. He even offered clothing to the poor if their nakedness was due to poverty. However, the people opposed Tipu's intentions, leading him to forcefully abolish this custom. The moral and social upliftment of his subjects was his ideal as a king. He provided financial assistance for the marriage of poor girls. However, the people of Malabar resisted embracing the civilizing aspects of Tipu's reforms. Conservative Hindus, who lost their previous status in society, viewed his reforms with suspicion. Tipu Sultan founded Farrukhabad (Feroke), a new town on the southern bank of the Chaliyar River, 8 miles south of Calicut, which became his capital in Malabar. The capital gave rise to a prosperous town with numerous industries and factories, making it one of the significant industrial towns in Kerala established by Tipu Sultan.



### 4.3.3 Changes in Revenue Systems and its Impact

- ◆ *Caste based land relation existed*
- ◆ *Land were owned by higher castes*

Tipu Sultan implemented an effective revenue system in Malabar. The landowners in Malabar were primarily the Upper Caste Hindus. The society in Malabar comprised various castes, including Nambutiris, Nairs, Tiyyas, and the lowest stratum of society. The higher caste had control over land monopoly, while the lower caste Hindus and Muslims were barred from owning land due to the unique land tenurial system in Malabar. Most people were directly dependent on agriculture and faced various forms of oppression. Private Jenmis held ownership of the land, and the feudal society interconnected caste and land. The Sultan personally collected land taxes from the cultivators. The Mysoreans replaced private land ownership with state control, which empowered the state in Malabar for the first time. Military tenures based on feudalism had to pay a land tax to the government.

- ◆ *Land revenue system modernised*
- ◆ *Roads constructed for commercial purpose and protection*

Under the Mysorean system, the land revenue system of Malabar was modernized. They introduced a land tax based on the actual land production and collected it directly from the tenants through officials. This new setup elevated the status of the tenants while negatively impacting the interests of the landowners. The Mysore rulers also introduced a new currency and developed a network of roads connecting different parts of North Kerala. Tipu Sultan is often credited as the pioneer of road construction in Malabar. Colonel Dow's report in 1796 stated that Tipu initiated and partially completed an extensive chain of roads that connected major places in Malabar, even reaching the wildest areas. These roads were well-maintained to facilitate the transportation of artillery as they led over the Ghats. The British administrators built upon the foundations laid by the Mysoreans to establish their administrative and political system in Malabar.

- ◆ *Higher caste lost the privilege they enjoyed*

The Mysorean period brought significant changes to the traditional Kerala society. In the pre-Mysorean era, upper castes like Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Nairs enjoyed privileged status. However, Hyder and Tipu showed little respect for these high castes and took measures to deprive them of their long-standing privileges. The Nairs faced particular persecution from the Mysore rulers, with women and children being sold as slaves and the Nairs being declared the lowest caste.

- ◆ *Old Social order was thoroughly destroyed*

The sight of high-caste Hindus, such as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Nairs, being forcibly converted to Islam or forced to flee from their sanctuaries had a profound psychological impact. It shattered the myth of their social superiority and instilled a sense of dignity and status among the lower classes. This Mysorean invasion marked the end of the old social order and ushered in a new era of social change in Kerala's history.

- ◆ *Ruin flourishing trade*
- ◆ *Economic Stagnation*

The Mysorean conquest had both positive and negative consequences. The incessant warfare during that period led to the economic ruin of the country. The brutalities committed by the Mysoreans resulted in mass migration from Malabar across various professions. Peasants, who suffered greatly, sought refuge in forests and jungles, leading to the decline of agriculture. The flight of Namboothiris and Kshatriyas, who were patrons of the arts and letters, caused a stagnation in cultural activities. Flourishing towns suffered ruin, and trade and commerce were severely affected, resulting in an economic depression. The cultivation of pepper, a significant trade commodity, almost came to a standstill. Agriculture and trade decline significantly, impoverishing large sections of the population. The accumulation of gold and silver from centuries of trade with the West vanished from the land.

- ◆ *Mysorean conquest had both positive and negative consequences*

However, the Mysorean rule also brought some positive aspects. Tipu Sultan took steps to regulate the activities of European companies and prevent their exploitation of agricultural commodities to the detriment of cultivators. The state set fixed prices for spices and other goods in order to regulate trade and ensure fair pricing.

## Summarised Overview

The Granthavaris, official and personal letters of English and natives, company correspondence, records, memoirs, and so on provide detailed insights into the polity, society, and economic situation of the 18th century. They offer ample evidence for the history of the Mysorean invasion, and historians hold different opinions regarding this period. Ongoing discussions and debates focus on these areas.

The lack of cooperation and unity among Kerala's rulers facilitated the annexation. The Zamorin of Calicut's expansionist intentions led to numerous wars with neighboring princes, creating politically advantageous conditions for Mysorean intervention. Internal dissensions among rulers and European powers engaging in intrigues to advance their commercial interests allowed Hyder Ali to exploit this opportunity and pursue his expansionist objectives in Kerala. Hyder Ali's interference in the Tarur *swarupam* gained him an advantage, leading to his subsequent invasion of Kozhikode. Despite the Zamorin's refusal to accept Hyder Ali's demands, his army invaded Kozhikode, resulting in the Zamorin's death. Hyder Ali then stationed two of his men, Raza Ali and Mathanna, in Calicut before departing for Palakkad. Landlords and chieftains, fearing Hyder Ali, fled to Central and South Kerala, but returned after the battle concluded in 1766.

In 1776, Hyder Ali attempted to invade Venad, including Cochin, Thrissur, and Kotunkolur, but the English and Dutch halted further progression to Venad. In 1782, the English East India Company captured most of the territories under Mysore, leaving Palakkattuseri as the only territory retained by Hyder Ali, which he entrusted to Tipu Sultan before departing for Srirangapattanam. After Hyder Ali's death on December 7, 1782, Tipu Sultan assumed power.

Immediately after assuming power, Tipu Sultan implemented arrangements for revenue estimation and taxation. This created resentment among the traditional landed class, and military raids instilled fear among the chieftains and landed class, prompting them to seek safety in Central and Southern Kerala. Travancore provided asylum to these people. The Zamorin's attempt to gain the support of the French army also failed due to French policies outside Kerala favoring Mysore.

In the 1770s, the English desired to end the war with Tipu Sultan due to economic burdens. They signed a treaty with Tipu, resulting in South Malabar falling under Tipu's control and North Malabar coming under the English East India Company. However, during Fullerton's time, the rivalry reignited, leading to the capture of Palakattuseri, which was subsequently placed under the Zamorin. Tipu recaptured it soon after.



In 1788, Tipu Sultan made preparations to invade Malabar, causing many to seek refuge in Travancore. Tipu's attempt to invade Travancore was repelled by English forces. However, in 1792, the Treaty of Srirangapatnam resulted in the English defeating Tipu Sultan, marking the end of Mysore's dominance.

Tipu's invasion had a profound impact on society. He abolished caste-based land ownership and abolished social practices such as polyandry. His administration centralized power, implemented systematic revenue assessment, developed defense systems, established markets and roads, protected ports, and promoted trade and commerce. Forts were constructed, and a trading company was established in Calicut. Feroke, Calicut, emerged as a significant center of trade and commerce with the establishment of a new town.

The land revenue system was modernized and reorganized, classifying land based on soil fertility. Taxes were collected on the actual production and directly from the tenants by the officials. Under Tipu Sultan, higher castes lost their monopoly over land in Kerala. It is said that trade also suffered during this period, and agriculture declined due to frequent migrations of people. These factors contributed to economic stagnation, particularly in Malabar.

## Self Assessment

1. Name the author of the book *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore*.
2. Mention the sources which throw light on Mysore invasion.
3. Who is the author of the book *Malabar in Asian Trade*?
4. Name the Palakkad ruler who sought the help of Mysore against Zamorin.
5. What was the reason for the Zamorin's ambition to unite Kerala under his supremacy?
6. What do you know about Srirangapatnam treaty?
7. What is the attitude of Tipu Sultan towards ryots?
8. What was the reason for the resentment of chieftains and landlords against Tipu Sultan?
9. Name the town founded by Tipu Sultan in Malabar.
10. Discuss the consequences of Tipu's Campaigns.



## Assignments

1. Critically analyse the revenue policy of Tipu Sultan in Malabar.
2. What are factors that led to the Mysore invasion in Kerala?
3. Bring out the importance of Hyder Ali's invasion of Malabar.
4. Discuss the impact of Mysore invasion.
5. Why did Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan fail to invade Venad?

## Suggested Readings

1. Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar*, Volume 2, Cambridge University Press, 2011.
2. K.V. Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, Norman Printing Bureau, 1938.
3. M. P Mujeebu Rehman, *The Other Side of The Story: Tipu Sultan, Colonialism And Resistance in Malabar*, National Book Stall, 2016.

## References

1. Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade, 1740–1800*, Cambridge University Press, 1967.
2. C. K. Kareem, *Kerala under Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan*, Kerala History Association, Paico Publishing House, 1973.
3. K.K.N.Kurup, *Nawab Tippu Sultan Oru Padanam* (mal.), Mathrubhumi Books, 2005.
4. N. Rajendran "Shifting Balance of Pepper Trade in the late Eighteenth Century" in papers in Honour of Prof. A.P. Ibrahim Kunju, Calicut, 1981.
5. P.K. Balakrishnan, *Tipu Sultan*, DC Books, 1970.



## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.





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# History of Kerala up to 1800 A.D.

COURSE CODE: M21HS02DC



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