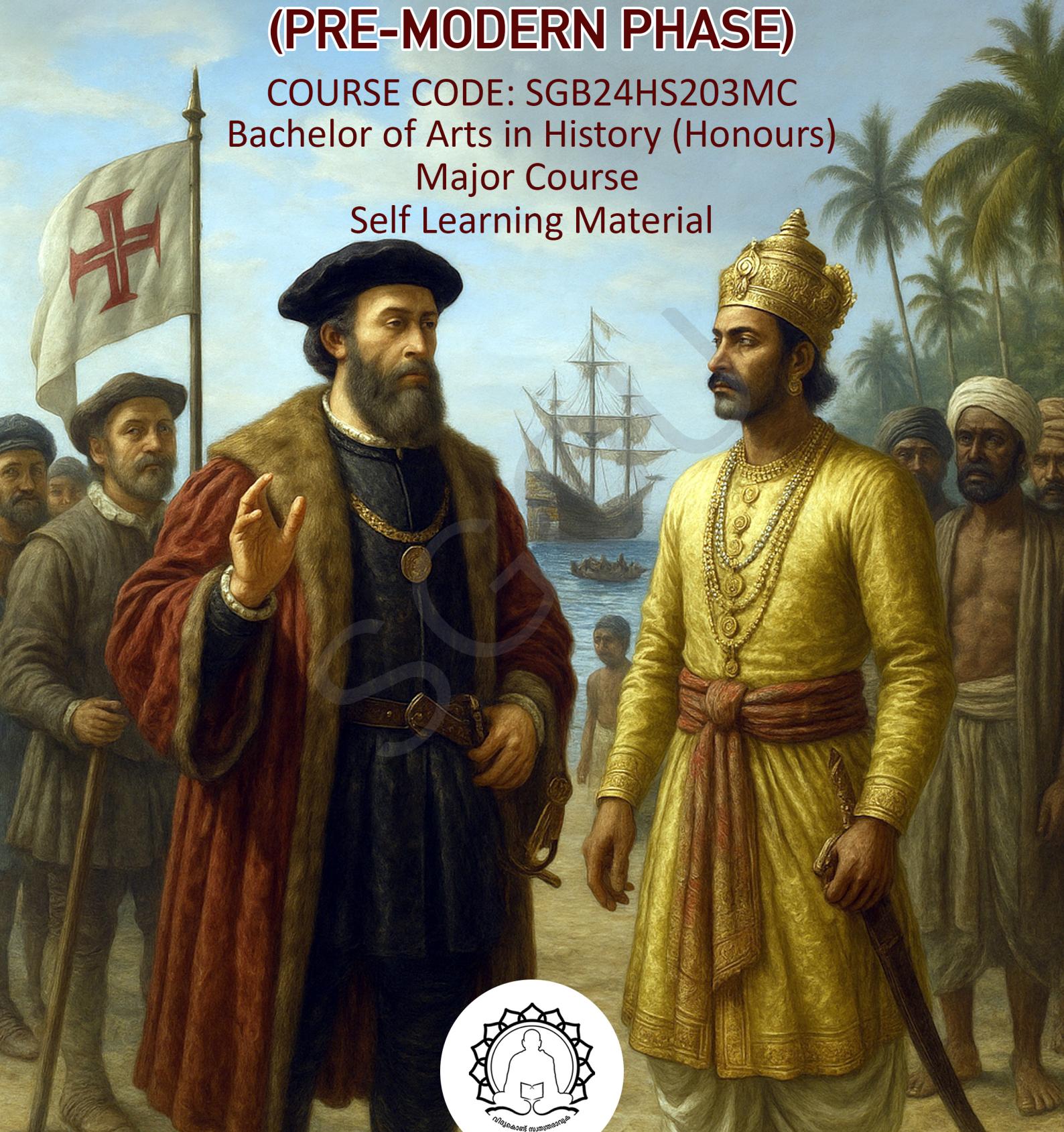


# HISTORY OF KERALA-I (PRE-MODERN PHASE)

COURSE CODE: SGB24HS203MC  
Bachelor of Arts in History (Honours)  
Major Course  
Self Learning Material



**SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY**

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**History of Kerala-I (Pre-modern Phase)**  
**Course Code: SGB24HS203MC**  
**Semester - III**

**Four Year Undergraduate Programme  
Bachelor of Arts in History (Honours)  
Major Course  
Self Learning Material**



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# HISTORY OF KERALA-I

## (PRE-MODERN PHASE)

Course Code: SGB24HS203MC

Semester- III

Major Course

Bachelor of Arts in History (Honours)

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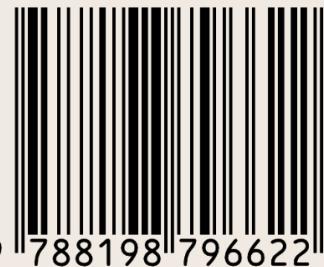
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Best regards,



Dr. Jagathy Raj V.P.  
Vice Chancellor  
Sreenarayanaguru Open University

01-05-2025

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# Historical Perspectives



# Precolonial Perspectives

## UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be:

- ◆ familiarised with how past has been understood and recorded in pre-modern times in Kerala
- ◆ introduced to the ways of utilising the recorded memory for validating the projects of the present
- ◆ made aware of the scope of reconstructing history from narratives of the bygone days by separating authentic information from mixes of facts and fiction

### Prerequisites

The notion that Indians lacked a sense of history has been convincingly disproven. A love for the past is an innate human trait, and ancient Indians indeed possessed a vivid awareness of their past, though it did not evolve into a secular, human-centered concept of history. Even during the Rig Vedic period, an oral tradition preserving historical memory existed, albeit in a vague and unstructured form. Across the Indian subcontinent, and up to 1200 CE, a variety of historical sources emerged, primarily in Sanskrit, Pali, and Tamil. The Brahmanical *Puranas*, the Buddhist *Pali Canon*, and Jain *Pattavalis*, though largely religious and social in content, contain significant historical material, despite not treating it in a conventionally historical manner. In Kerala, a distinct tradition of recording the past developed. Royal genealogies (*vamsa*) and records of priestly succession formed another category of ancient historical writing, giving rise to a vast corpus of quasi-historical literature. When these scattered narratives were compiled and

systematized, they evolved into the *vamsanucharita*, which later contributed to the political sections of the *Puranas*. One notable example of this tradition is the *Mushika Vamsa*, a historical *kavya* composed in the *vamsa* style.

## Keywords

*Mushakavamsa Kavya, Keralolpathi, Tuhfat-ul Mujahidin, Legends, Fables, Myths*

## Discussion

### 1.1.1 *Mushakavamsa Kavya*

*Mushakavamsa Kavya* was written in the eleventh century by poet Atula. He was the court poet of the Mushaka king Srikanta. The poem narrates the dynastic history and legendary genealogy of Mushaka kings of Ezhimala.

The poet begins with the legend of Parasurama. As per the story, the Queen of Mahishmati escaped the massacre of Kshatriyas and fled to Kerala. The pregnant queen delivered a boy who was named Ramaghata. He founded the Mushaka dynasty and named it after the mouse's house in which he was born.

*Mushakavamsa Kavya* is the oldest available Sanskrit *Mahakavya*. It consists of one thousand poems which are divided into fifteen cantos. Though the earlier cantos are mythical, the last four are certainly historical. The poem is written in the style of Sanskrit *kavyas*. Its poetic style resembles that of *Raghuvamsa* but the structure of its historical narrative is similar to that of Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, dated to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. *Rajatarangini* narrates the dynastic history of Kashmir kings in a chronological order and was for long considered the earliest work of history

from India. Using epigraphic references, *Mushakavamsa Kavya* has been dated to the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, *Mushakavamsa Kavya* should be taken to have preceded *Rajatarangini* by a century.

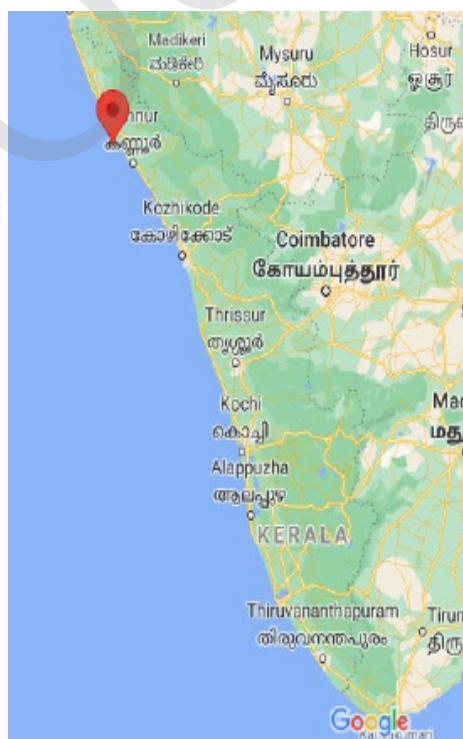


Fig 1.1.1 Location of Ezhimala in present day Kerala

Atula's *kavya* is based on courtly traditions and legendary fables. It is a mix of facts and fables. As a source of

history, it provides important information about the political history of early Kerala. As a dynastic history, it speaks about the nature of relation between various dynasties which ruled over early Kerala and Tamilakam. It tells that Mushakas were related to Cheras and Cholas through marriage. It also speaks about the Chera-Chola wars, Mushaka assistance towards Cheras, Chera incursions into Ezhimala area etc. As a court historian, Atula used the poem to win legitimacy for his patrons. According to Atula, Mushaka kings were descendants of Yadavakula Kshatriyas.

Atula described Srikanta as the one hundred and eighteenth ruler of Mushaka dynasty. Some of the kings mentioned in the *kavya* are mentioned in Sangam literature as well. The king Nanda of Mushaka dynasty is named in Sangam poetry. The Mushaka king Vikramaraman is mentioned in the Narayan-Kannur inscription. This inscription is dated to 929 C.E. The king Valabhan II of the dynasty is believed to have been the founder of Marahi (Madayi) and Valabhapattanam (Valapattanam) ports. The book also refers to the king Jayaraga. On the basis of inscriptional evidence, historians were able to identify this ruler with the Vijayaraga of the *Chera* line of rulers.

Although Atula's *kavya* belonged to Sanskrit *kavya* traditions, it did not inspire similar traditions of history-writing in early Kerala. Therefore, Atula's poem, *Mushakavamsa Kavya*, stands alone as a historical work in the early histories of Kerala. It has rightly been pointed out that the last four *sargas* of *Mushakavamsa Kavya* "dealing with events from the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards are definitely historical in character" and that the work has to be "treated as original contemporary source of first-rate importance."

### 1.1.2 *Keralolpathi*

Legends and fables have played an important role in the reconstruction of Kerala's past. But none has played a greater role than the legends of *Keralolpathi*. As a source of history, its stories are incredible and mind-boggling but like oral traditions around the world these carry within them "embedded histories," as Romila Thapar had put it. It is up to the historians to separate the grain from the chaff.

The most fanciful and exciting among its stories is the creation legend of Kerala by sage Parasurama. According to it, sage Parasurama, one of the avatars of Lord Vishnu, threw his axe from Gokarna to Kanyakumari and the sea receded up to the point where the axe fell. The reclaimed land was donated to Brahmins from sixty-four northern "grama" or villages. The Brahmins were given *Sastrabhiksha* or training in martial arts to defend their persons and property. They were also entrusted with the government of land and its administration. To this end, a group of Brahmin warriors were formed who were known as *cattar* or *cattirar*. Thus, Parasurama created Kerala and established it as *Brahmakshetra*, land donated to Brahmins and to be governed by them. However, in due course, Brahmins found the deleterious effects of administration as feuds broke among them. They decided to hand over administration to Kshatriyas from the neighbouring Tamilakam.

As an oral tradition, *Keralolpathi* has many recensions. It may be divided into three parts that narrate three distinct political transitions through which Kerala had gone. The first is the 'age of Parasurama,' the second is the 'age of Perumals' and the third is the 'age of Thampurans.' The story of the age of Parasurama is also the origin myth of Kerala. The second age describes the arrival of Perumakkan, or Perumals from

Tamilakam who ruled over Kerala as its sovereign overlords. The third part narrates the post-Perumal polity of Kerala where local chieftains established their supremacy in the absence of Perumal overlords, an important transition to which the legend of Cheraman Perumal hints.

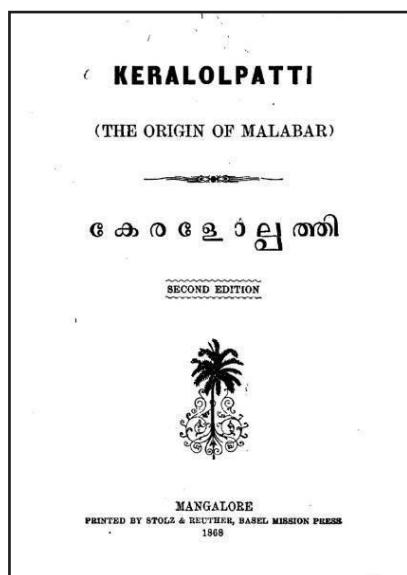


Fig 1.1.2 Cover Page of a modern edition of Keralolpathi

In view of the mythical nature of the book, Logan has called the work a “Farrago of legendary nonsense”. The confused mix of fact and fiction as given in the book will not qualify for academic history. But this will in no way deprive its claim to be a source for a study of Kerala’s distant past. Narrated with authority as the unfolding of a collective memory, the book clearly affirms its right to dominate the social order. For the historian, what can be made use of is not the structure of the story but the function as well as the sequential ordering of the contents.

### 1.1.3 *Tuhfat-ul Mujahidin*

*Tuhfat-ul Mujahidin* is a sixteenth century historical treatise written by Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdum. Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdum was born in Mahe in 1517 into a family of Islamic scholars. His

father was Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdum I, a great scholar of Islamic sciences himself. After completing his studies under his father, he left for Mecca for further studies in Islamic jurisprudence. He successfully completed his studies and earned advanced degrees in the field. He returned to Kerala where he was appointed as the *Qazi* (Chief Judge) of Ponnani.

*Tuhfat-ul Mujahidin fi ba'd Akhbar al-Burtughaliyin'*, shortened as *Tuhfat-ul Mujahidin* was completed by Sheikh Zainuddin in 1583. It is considered as the first historical narrative written by a Keralite. It narrates the socio-cultural and political history of Malabar in the sixteenth century. It narrates the history of Portuguese colonial intervention along Malabar coast from the perspective of a native Muslim. As a work of political history, it recounts many atrocities the Portuguese committed upon the natives, their hatred for Muslims, Portuguese capture of foreign trade, spice trade and their monopoly over maritime trade routes. It also narrates the history of rivalry between kings of Kozhikode and Cochin and how Portuguese skillfully used this rivalry to advance their interests in Kerala.

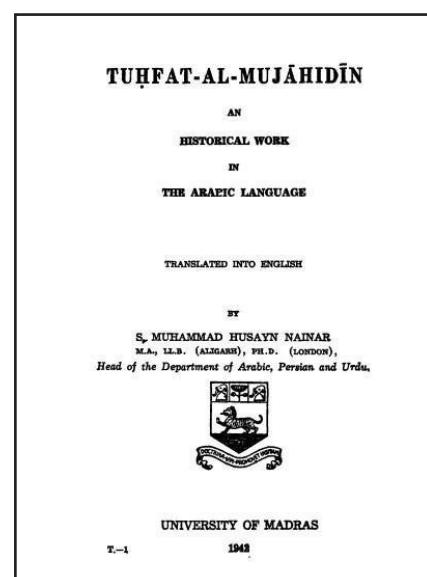


Fig 1.1.3 Cover Page of 1942 English Translation of *Tuhfat-ul Mujahidin*

*Tuhfat-ul Mujahidin* is a history of early indigenous resistance to European colonialism. Sheikh Zainuddin tells us about the stubborn armed resistance of Zamorins of Calicut and Mappila Muslims against Portuguese colonialism. He exhorts Muslims from Malabar and rest of the world to wage *jihad* (just war) against Portuguese because of their cruelty towards natives and their hatred on account of their atrocities towards Muslims in particular. The book was dedicated to the Sultan of Bijapur, Adil Shah.

*Tuhfat-ul Mujahidin* is written in the Arab scheme of historical writing. The book is divided into five parts with an introduction and four chapters. In the introduction, Sheikh Zainuddin explains the need for *jihad* against Portuguese. He justifies his conclusions with relevant theological discussion. The second part details the land and geography of Kerala. It describes the various ports found along Malabar coast. The third part is more ethnographic. It tells us about the status of Muslims in Kerala, respect accorded to them by the rulers, their dominance of foreign trade, and the different customs of castes in Kerala. It includes a discussion of status of castes, rules of ritual pollution

and purity, matriliney etc. The fourth part discusses the political events from the arrival of the Portuguese and the wars the two sides waged. It roughly spans from 1498 to 1583 C.E.

Sheikh Makhdum's social position allowed him to interact with the political figures of his day. This has added another layer of historicity to his work. He witnessed and participated in the events he described. However, this is also a drawback of the work. As a chronicle, it has faithfully recounted the social practices of the age and has presented the political history in a chronological manner. By the standards of modern historiography, facts should be analysed and incorporated into a framework of analysis. Sheikh Zainuddin has not done it in *Tuhfat-ul Mujahidin*. This is because the purpose of writing the work was more political than academic. The concerns of the author about the economic losses and social degradation suffered by Muslims and the natives of Malabar are evident throughout the work. Sheikh Zainuddin has used history to foreground the contemporary politics of sixteenth century Malabar. History writing is a genre that has been differently practiced across the world.

## Recap

- ◆ *Mushakavamsa Kavya* was written by poet Atula in the eleventh century.
- ◆ It is a dynastic history and the legendary genealogy of the Mushaka kings of Ezhimala.
- ◆ *Mushakavamsa Kavya* is the oldest extant Sanskrit *Mahakavya*.
- ◆ The *Mahakavya* speaks about Mushaka relations with Cheras and Cholas.
- ◆ Srikanta was the first historically attested ruler of the dynasty.

- ◆ *Mushakavamsa Kavya* gives insight into early political history and relationships among dynasties.
- ◆ It mentions kings also noted in Sangam literature and inscriptions.
- ◆ *Keralolpathi* consists of fables, legends and stories about the origin of Kerala.
- ◆ It recounts Parasurama creating Kerala by throwing his axe and reclaiming land from the sea.
- ◆ It was divided into three parts- age of Parasurama, age of Perumals, and age of Tampurans.
- ◆ The work was called a ‘Farrago of legendary nonsense’ by Logan.
- ◆ *Tuhfat-ul Mujahidin* is a sixteenth century historical treatise written by Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdum II, a 16th century Islamic scholar and Qazi of Ponnani.
- ◆ *Tuhfat* is an account of socio-cultural and political history of Malabar particularly Portuguese colonial intervention, atrocities and native’s response on it.
- ◆ It is written in the style of Arab historiography.
- ◆ The account is divided into five parts: introduction, geography of Kerala, ethnographic details, and political events from 1498 to 1583.

## Objective Questions

1. Who was the first ruler of the Mushaka dynasty according to *Mushakavamsa Kavya*?
2. Which Sanskrit kavya does *Mushakavamsa kavya* resemble stylistically?
3. Which historical text does *Mushakavamsa kavya* resemble in its historical structure?
4. Who is the Mushaka king mentioned in Narayan-Kannur inscriptions?
5. Who founded the ports of Marahi and Valabhapattanam?
6. What is a *Brahmakshetra*?

7. Who succeeded Brahmins as the rulers of Kerala?
8. Which were the three parts of '*Keralolpathi*'?
9. Where was Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdum II born?
10. What does *Tuhfat-ul Mujahidin* discuss?
11. Who led the main line of resistance against Portuguese in Malabar?
12. How many chapters does *Tuhfat-ul Mujahidin* have?
13. What are the themes of the fourth and fifth chapters of *Tuhfat-ul Mujahidin*?

## Answers

1. Ramaghata
2. *Raghuvamsa*
3. *Rajatarangini*
4. King Vikramaraman
5. King Valabhan II
6. Land donated to Brahmins for administration
7. Kshatriyas of Tamilakam
8. Ages of Parasurama, Perumals and Tampurans
9. Mahe (1517)
10. Socio-cultural aspects of Malabar and political history of Portuguese colonialism
11. Zamorins of Calicut and Mappila Muslims
12. Five; an introduction and four main chapters
13. Fourth- Discussion on the society and customs of Malabar; fifth- a historical account of Portuguese in Malabar from 1498 to 1583

## Assignments

1. Discuss pre-modern historiographical traditions of Kerala with those in the rest of India.
2. Analyse the role of legends and myths in the *Keralolpathi* as a source of historical information. How do historians approach such sources to extract credible historical data, and what challenges do they face?
3. Discuss the socio-political structure of 16th-century Malabar as described in Sheikh Zainuddin Makhsum's *Tuhfat-ul Mujahidin*. How does the author portray the impact of Portuguese colonialism on the Mappila community and their resistance efforts?
4. Examine the information provided by *Mushakavamsa Kavya* about the dynastic relations between the Mushakas, Cheras, and Cholas.
5. Discuss the role of texts such as *Mushakavamsa Kavya*, *Keralolpathi*, and *Tuhfat-ul Mujahidin* in the historical reconstruction of premodern Kerala.

## Suggested Reading

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## Colonial Historiography

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be:

- ◆ introduced to major colonial sources on Kerala history
- ◆ made aware of the importance of colonial archival sources for reconstructing the past
- ◆ familiarised with the methodologies of the colonial historiography and their role in shaping the colonial and post-colonial narratives

### Prerequisites

The British colonialists were not primarily concerned with the history of Kerala. The liberal intellectual spirit that inspired James Mill to write his *History of India* did not significantly influence most British administrators. They arrived in India as conquerors, and to consolidate their control, it became necessary to understand the complexities of the society they governed. This need was especially pressing in the realm of revenue administration, where a thorough understanding of the traditional land system was essential. Given that land rights were deeply rooted in the political and economic framework of the region, and were also shaped by geographical variations, the British were compelled to study the area's polity, economy, and geography in detail. This foundational work is evident in the studies conducted by Buchanan, Ward and Conner, and other officials tasked with examining the land system for revenue purposes. However, such inquiries naturally extended into the recent past. For instance, the Joint Commissioners of Malabar (1802–03), in their examination of the land system, delved into the period of Mysore rule and the development of customary land



rights. Understanding the present required referencing the past, and thus British administrative efforts inevitably incorporated historical context. During the 19th century, as part of their colonial governance, the British compiled district manuals to document historical and socio-economic information about the regions they ruled. The responsibility for these manuals was given to trusted officers, and as a result, separate manuals were prepared for each district.

## Keywords

Manuals, Gazetteers, Survey Reports, Malabar Manual, Ethnographic Studies

## Discussion

### 1.2.1 Manuals, Gazetteers and Survey Reports

British authorities in the nineteenth century began to prepare district manuals to gather information regarding people, geography and other local pieces of information. This can be seen as part of the institutional procedures set up by the British for the study of the colonised people and the effective management of the rules. One of the important sources among them was the manual prepared under William Logan. He edited the 'Malabar Manual' in 1887. The work contains the details of geography, climate, people and society, and most importantly, the history of the Malabar region. A detailed evaluation of the work is mentioned in next sections.

Inspired by Logan's work, several other manuals were produced under the initiative of the governments of the princely states, viz., the 'Travancore State Manual' and 'Cochin State Manual.' 'The Travancore State Manual' was written and published under the orders of the King of Travancore.



Fig 1.2.1 V Nagam Aiya (1850-1917)

V Nagam Aiya, who was the Dewan of the Travancore government, thus wrote the State Manual in 1906. The significant themes and contents of the work include the antiquity of Travancore, detailed examination of flora and fauna, climatic changes, boundaries, landscapes, and social and economic conditions. Nagam Aiya was inspired by the work of Sundaram Pillai, 'Some Early Sovereigns of Travancore.'

T. K. Velu Pillai produced the revised edition of the Travancore Manual in 1940. The new edition is available in four volumes containing the original work of Nagam Aiya.

C. Achuta Menon compiled the 'Cochin State Manual' in 1911. The manual is regarded as a corpus of historical understanding of Cochin State. The works portrayed the social, economic and historical conditions of the Cochin state.

## Survey Reports

The British administrators conducted surveys to frame their understanding of Kerala society. In 1792-93, the effort to study the land system of Malabar was achieved by the survey conducted by the Joint Commissioners of Malabar. The initial effort to compile the historical analysis from the surveys was made under Buchanan, Ward and Conner.

Buchanan was asked to conduct a survey after the defeat of Mysore in 1799. His effort resulted in the compilation of the work "A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar" in 1807.

From 1816 to 1820, Benjamin Swain Ward and Peter Eyre Conner conducted extensive surveys in Kerala. Their joint effort resulted in the publication of 'Memoir of the Survey of Travancore and Cochin State' and 'A Descriptive Memoir of Malabar.' Together, these works are a mine of information on the topography and profile of the population in each of the districts.

The work of P. Shangoonny Menon was considered relevant for the students dealing with the History of Travancore. He tried to trace the history of the princely

state from the earliest times. He was an administrator under the Travancore government. He relied upon *granthavaris*, oral tradition, legendary and traditional sources to compose his work.

P. Shangoonny Menon's work was criticised for being non-analytical in terms of its quality. K. N. Ganesh has commented that Shangoonny Menon's narrative lacked an analytical presentation of facts. Menon was criticised for being more interested in presenting 'court history' rather than details having socio-political and economic implications. He is recognised generally as a proponent of the princely states.

## Gazetteers

Gazetteers are generally a geographical index which was used as an official reference book of administrators. The work contains a description of flora, fauna and climatic changes of a place.

'Malabar District Gazetteer' (1908) by Innes and Evans was one of the notable gazetteers. Charles Alexander Innes started the initial work of 'Malabar District Gazetteer' from 1904-05. However, he could not complete his work. Subsequently, A.R.C. Tottenham and C.W.E. Cotton completed the work. F.B. Evans did the task of publishing the gazetteer in 1908. The work is a collection of political history, people, geography, health, justice, economy and other aspects of Malabar and is widely praised for the volume, variety and precision of its contents.

Later, in 1962, the Government of Kerala began to issue district gazetteers. The major district gazetteers include those of Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam,

Alappuzha, Kottayam, Ernakulam, Thrissur, Kozhikode, Kannur, Palakkad and Malappuram. The hazardous task of editing the gazetteers was carried out by A.Sreedhara Menon, who could make use of the enormous data in the writing of his works on the history of Kerala.

### **1.2.2 Malabar Manual of William Logan and his Approach**

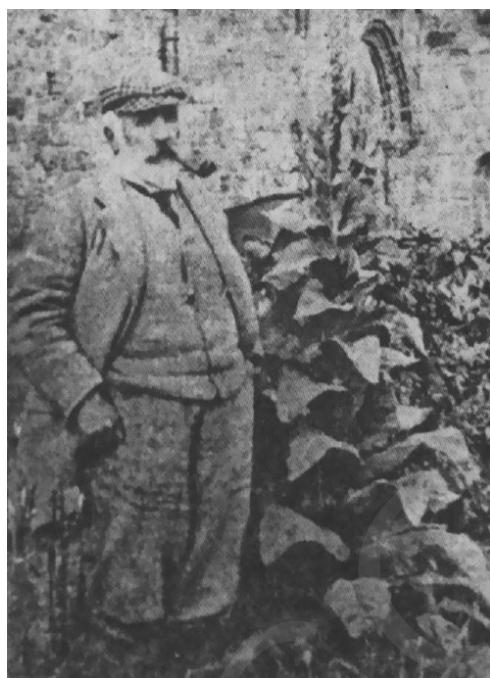


Fig 1.2.2 William Logan (1841-1914)

William Logan was a colonial administrator in Kerala who has worked as a magistrate, judge, special commissioner and district collector. 'Malabar Manual' is the work produced by William Logan in 1887. The work was divided into four parts. The first part of the book contains the details of the geographical peculiarities of Malabar, its flora and fauna. The second part of the book contains details of religion, caste, customs, population, language, literature and social order. The third part discusses the history of Malabar in particular. This section contains the

details on Malabar ports, the invasion of Mysore, and the British up to 1885. Part four of the manual deals explicitly with revenue administration and tenancy rights prevailed in the state.

Logan was the first to use archaeological and epigraphical evidence to reconstruct the past. He drew his inferences from legendary works like 'Keralolpathi', folk literature, travel accounts, inscriptions, and other oral sources. However, Logan never tried to blend factual and traditional history to frame his narrative.

He, therefore, followed a critical approach while dealing with the traditional sources. For that reason, we can insist that he initiated the tradition of the scientific approach in writing Kerala's history. In his approach to history, Logan never tried to glorify the British administration. He has critiqued the British officers for their incompetence and corruption through his work. He argued that the main cause for the Mappila outrage in Malabar was purely agrarian.

### **1.2.3 Ethnographic Studies of Edgar Thurston, L. A Krishna Iyer, and L.K.A Iyer**

Ethnography is the study of individual cultures. Ethnographic studies formed another set of colonial historiographies in understanding the land and its people. The ethnographic studies were initiated to classify the distinctness of Indian society and show the hegemony of the White.

Some of the ethnographers and anthropologists of the colonial period who worked in Kerala were Edgar Thurston, L. A. Krishna Iyer, and L. K. Ananthakrishna Iyer. These scholars' works were considered an essential source for tracing the trajectory of caste prejudices in Kerala

and other societies.



Fig 1.2.3 Edgar Thurston (1885-1935)

Edgar Thurston was among the leading ethnographers and anthropologists to trace the history of caste and tribes of South India. Thurston was appointed to the Ethnographic Survey of India in 1901. In 1906, Thurston published an ethnographic study called 'Ethnographic Notes in Southern India.' The most famous among his works was 'Caste and Tribes of Southern India,' published in 1909. K. Rangachari assisted him in his work.

The work was produced in seven volumes containing the details of ethnographic groups of the Madras Presidency and states of Travancore, Mysore, Coorg and Pudukottai. The work employed anthropomorphic measures to define caste and tribes. His work motivated the British ethnographer Herbert Risley in his ethnographic surveys.



Figure 1.2.4 Ananthakrishna Iyer (1861-1937)

Another anthropologist of British India was L. K. Ananthakrishna Iyer, and is known for his works 'Caste and Tribes of Mysore' and 'The Cochin Tribes and Caste.' 'The Cochin Tribes and Caste' was published in 1912 that speaks of 'untouchables' in Kerala society.

The work is different from the work of Thurston by describing caste and their customs and practices, not by dealing with anthropomorphic references. Same in this genre, L. A. Krishna Iyer produced his work "The Travancore Tribes and Caste" in 1939. The work was produced in three volumes containing details of tribes and their origin, tradition, habitation, and customs of tribes in southern Kerala.

## Recap

- ◆ Manuals, gazetteers and survey reports were conducted mainly for British administrative purposes.
- ◆ Nagam Aiya produced the *Travancore State Manual* in 1906.
- ◆ T. K .Velu Pillai produced the revised edition of *Travancore State Manual* in 1940.
- ◆ C. Achuta Menon compiled the *Cochin State Manual* in 1911.
- ◆ Buchanan, Benjamin Swain Ward and Peter Eyre Conner initially conducted the survey reports of Kerala.
- ◆ P.Shangoony Menon was a native historian who produced *History of Travancore from the Earliest Times* in 1878.
- ◆ Gazetteers are generally the geographical index.
- ◆ *Malabar District Gazetteer* by Innes and Evans compiled in 1908.
- ◆ William Logan compiled the *Malabar Manual* in 1887.
- ◆ The Malabar Manual is divided into four parts and provided details on geography, climate, people, society and history of Malabar.
- ◆ Logan was critical to the British administration and blamed British colonists.
- ◆ Ethnographic studies of Thurston helped to analyse how colonial masters conceive Indians.

## Objective Questions

1. What was the name of the district manual produced by William Logan?
2. Who produced the *Travancore State manual* and when?
3. Whose work inspired Nagam Aiya to produce Manual?
4. Who produced the revised edition of the *Travancore State manual*?

5. When did the *Cochin State Manual* get published?
6. Who worked for producing the *Cochin State Manual*?
7. What was the work of Francis Buchanan?.
8. Which were the texts produced by Benjamin Swain Ward and Peter Eyre Conner?
9. What was the work of P. Shangoonny Menon?
10. Who wrote the *Malabar District Gazetteer*?
11. Who completed the *Malabar District Gazetteer*?
12. Who took the effort to publish the Malabar District Gazetteer in 1908?
13. Who initiated the tradition of the scientific approach in writing Kerala history?
14. Who was the first to give information that the Mappila rebellion was caused due to agrarian dissatisfaction?
15. Who influenced Thurston to produce his ethnographic work?
16. Who assisted Thurston to prepare his work?
17. Who authored *The Travancore Tribes and Caste* in 1939?

## Answers

1. Malabar Manual
2. V. Nagam Aiya in 1906
3. Sundaram Pillai, *The Early Sovereigns of Travancore*
4. T. K. Velu Pillai
5. 1911
6. C. Achuta Menon

7. "A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar"
8. Memoir of the Survey of Travancore and Cochin State and A Descriptive Memoir of Malabar
9. History of Travancore from the Earliest Times in 1878
10. Innes and Evans
11. A.R.C Tottenham and C.W.E Cotton
12. F.B Evans
13. William Logan
14. William Logan
15. British ethnographer Herbert Risley
16. K. Rangachari
17. L.A .Krishna Iyer

## Assignments

1. Explain the drawbacks of Colonial historiography of Kerala.
2. Discuss the nature of the *Granthavari* tradition of the 19th century.
3. Discuss the significance of William Logan's *Malabar Manual* in the context of British colonial administration.
4. Analyse the impact of survey reports conducted by British administrators like Buchanan, Ward, and Conner on the understanding of Kerala's socio-economic conditions.
5. Evaluate the contributions of ethnographic studies by Edgar Thurston, L. A. Krishna Iyer, and L. K. Ananthakrishna Iyer to the historiography of caste and tribes in South India. How did their methodologies and perspectives differ?

## Suggested Reading

1. Cohn, Bernard S., *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*. Princeton University Press, 1996.
2. Dirks, Nicholas B, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton University Press, 2001.
3. Iyer, L. K. Ananthakrishna, *The Cochin Tribes and Caste*, 1912.
4. Thurston, Edgar, *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India*, 1906.

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1. Aiya, V. Nagam, *Travancore State Manual*, 1906.
2. Cherian, P. J., (Ed.), *Perspectives in Kerala History*, Kerala State Gazetteers Department, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999.
3. Logan, William, *Malabar Manual*, 1887.
4. Menon, A. Sreedhara, *A Survey of Kerala History*, D. C Books, Kottayam, 2019.
5. Menon, C. Achuta, *Cochin State Manual*, 1911.



## Modern Historiography

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be:

- ◆ introduced to the stages of progress in historical writing in 20<sup>th</sup> century Travancore by native initiatives
- ◆ explained to the significance of inscriptions in determining the chronology of rulers in early medieval history
- ◆ made aware of the complexities involved in correlating various sources for the reconstruction of chronology

### Prerequisites

During the British colonial period, history began to emerge as a distinct academic discipline and method of inquiry. By the early 20th century, a new English-educated middle-class intelligentsia had developed in Kerala, mirroring trends across India. This class brought with it a more progressive outlook on social and political issues. At the same time, growing material evidence for Kerala's past made it possible not only to construct a non-traditional framework for interpreting the region's history but also to re-examine traditional narratives in light of new findings. Although the search for a comprehensive framework continued, it remained a work in progress. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, a key figure of this emerging intelligentsia, is often regarded as the first modern historian of Kerala. Later, Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai became one of the earliest scholars to systematically analyse inscriptional evidence and recognise the historical importance of megalithic burials in understanding Kerala's socio-political

development. He also successfully integrated literary and artistic sources with other forms of evidence and critically examined oral traditions. Building on this foundation, M.G.S. Narayanan advanced Kerala historiography further by making extensive use of inscriptional sources to reconstruct the history of the Later Cheras (Perumals) with greater scholarly rigour than his predecessors.

## Keywords

Cochin, Sangam, Second Chera Empire, *Marumakkathayam*, Perumals

## Discussion

### 1.3.1 K.P. Padmanabha Menon

K. P. Padmanabha Menon is considered as the first modern historian of Kerala. With the publication of his works, art of history writing in Kerala started to move away from gazetteers and similar modes of colonial historiography. Padmanabha Menon introduced a systematic and chronologically consistent style of history writing in Kerala. In his works, there are glimpses of an analytical framework that interprets as much as it narrates facts and details of history.

Menon's first major work was the history of Cochin state which was originally published in Malayalam as 'Kochi Rajya Charitram' between 1912 and 1914. By critically using traditional and modern secondary sources, Menon wrote a systematic history of Cochin state. As a two-volume work, 'History of Cochin' traced its history from ancient to modern period.

Padmanabha Menon divided the

people of Kerala into two groups, the early settlers and outsiders. The early settlers included the aboriginal tribes and castes such as Cherumars, Pulayars etc. The outsiders were Nambudiris, Nairs, Christians, Ezhavas, Muslims, Jews etc. It is evident from these lists that the early settlers were later transformed into the class of agrarian labourers and agrestic slaves. The first volume of the work deals with the history of early settlers and outsiders who reached the shores of Cochin. It describes their lives and various caste and social organisations in detail. The second volume begins with the arrival of Portuguese in Kerala. According to Menon "the Portuguese arrived in India to achieve three main goals:"

1. To gain monopoly over sea routes and maritime trade;
2. To conquer territories;
3. Proselytise the natives into Christians.



Although Padmanabha Menon relied on *Keralolpathi* as a source of traditional history, he rejected the legends of Parasurama and Cheraman Perumal's conversion. The critical use of traditional sources is a hallmark of critical historiography. Therefore, Padmanabha Menon's work was a step in the right direction.

Although Menon's *History of Cochin* was his masterpiece, he came to be widely known for his four-volume *History of Kerala*. As it was published posthumously the volumes were edited and published by Menon's literary executor, T.K. Krishna Menon. It was originally titled Notes on Visscher's Letters from Malabar and Padmanabha Menon made T.K. Krishna Menon his literary executor in his personal testament and will. It was Krishna Menon's idea to collate the notes, edit and publish them as a series of volumes called *History of Kerala*. The title is misleading as it does not present a systematic, chronologically consistent narrative like his previous history of Cochin. Instead, these were elaborately prepared notes on the 'Letters from Malabar,' written by Jacobus Canter Visscher who was a Dutch chaplain who lived in Cochin in the eighteenth century, between 1717 and 1723.

In its final form, *History of Kerala*, published posthumously, turned out to be a commentary rather than a precise book of history. It does not offer a comprehensive analysis or interpretation. It could be that Padmanabha Menon was engaged in a new project of writing the history of Kerala and these notes were prepared with that end in view. He breathed his last in 1919 and the first volume of the history was published in 1924, five years after his passing away. The rest of the volumes were published till 1937.

### 1.3.2. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai

A historian who revolutionised the historical landscape of Kerala, Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai made a mark with his splendid contributions in historiography. Born in the Elamkulam district in Kollam, he did his schooling at both Trivandrum and Kollam. He began his career as a lecturer of Malayalam and retired as the head of Department in University College, Trivandrum. He was deeply interested in the history of languages, culture and history of society. He learned many languages- Kannada, Tamil, Tulu, Pali etc. and was associated with Mortimer Wheeler during the Harappa archaeological excavations.

The State of Kerala was formed in the Indian Union in 1960. Much more than a linguistic unity, the state also imagined its cultural unity and continuity. But Kerala was still without a written account of its past. Therefore, a historical account of the Malayalam speaking people conforming to the canons of disciplinary history was felt as an immediate necessity. In the meantime, Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai who was a lecturer in Malayalam, recognised the fact that literature of Kerala cannot be studied or even appreciated without a proper understanding of the historical setting of the literary creations. Elamkulam insisted that History of Kerala be introduced as a subject of study for students of Malayalam literature. On realising that books on Kerala history that would suit student requirements did not exist, Elamkulam initiated the task of writing them down. It was his arduous task that provided Kerala with more than ten books on history and culture of Kerala. This is in addition to several other books on Malayalam literature.

His contributions marked a new era in Kerala historiography. The most popular

among his works are *Sahityamalika*, *Gandhidevan*, *Leelathilakam*, *Janmi Sampradayam* *Keralathil*, *Annathe Keralam*, *Keralacharithrathile Iruladanja Edukal*, *Studies in Kerala History* and *Some Problems in Kerala History* are the works he wrote in English and ‘*Pandai Keralam*’ in Tamil respectively. He pioneered the correlation of various types of sources literary and archaeological for the reconstruction of Kerala history. An overview of the titles would reveal that Elamkulam could not write a comprehensive work on the history of Kerala certainly on account of the limitations of the period. For sure, he had done the necessary groundwork from where scholars could forge ahead.

An overview of Elamkulam in the domain of historical studies is obligatory for an appreciation of the research done thereafter. He painstakingly studied the Sangam literary works and with his knowledge in Tamil, he maintained that the Sangam literature was composed during the fifth and sixth centuries.

He brought together over two dozen epigraphs that were lying scattered in different parts of South India. He also used coins, travel accounts, literary works in Tamil, Malayalam, Sanskrit and other regional languages to write history in a comprehensive and coherent manner. He refrained from accepting legends and relied mainly on literature and material evidence. His language skills have gained much acclaim for his visual imagery. Initiating his studies on the period of the Cheras, he presumed that after the end of the Cheras of the Sangam period, there was the Second Chera Empire and that the name of the dynasty was 'Kulasekhara.' He attributed the founding of the dynasty to a certain Kulasekhara. He strongly claimed that Cheras established a strong empire

during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Century Kollam Era with their capital at Mahodayapuram (present day Kodungalloor). He also put forward the idea that *Marumakkathayam* (matrilineal system) came into existence by the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> century and that as its consequence that the Namboothiri Brahmins acquired prominence in the society.

Having examined the epigraphic references to recurrent battles between the Cheras and the Cholas, Elamkulam contended that it was a war that lasted for over hundred years, and he used the expression “the Hundred Years War in Kerala History”. On the basis of literary sources, Elamkulam elucidated the practices associated with the *Devadasi* system and the *marumakkathayam* system of inheritance during the period of the Cheras. In consideration of a long line of ‘imperial’ rule and literary achievements Elamkulam considered the period of the Cheras as the 'Golden Age in Kerala History.' It has to be said that it was Elamkulam who prepared the ground for the beginning of historical research in a manner making a departure from the earlier traditions.

### 1.3.3 M.G.S. Narayanan

Born in Ponnani, M.G.S. Narayanan completed his education at Madras Christian College and pursued his doctoral studies in the University of Kerala. He had been working as Head of the Department of History at University of Calicut. As the member secretary and still later as the Chairman of the Indian Council for Historical Research, he led academic research initiatives and studies at the national level.

Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai had inaugurated a new era in the historiography of Kerala with the use of non-traditional



sources and advanced methodologies for understanding the past and it is held that the pioneering works of Elamkulam has provided a firm foundation for historical studies in relation to Kerala. M. G. S Narayanan had a sufficiently long spell of training in *Vattezhuthu* and early Malayalam language, under Elamkulam. This was also the period when the two scholars could hold discussions on various aspects of South Indian history, particularly those associated with Medieval Kerala. It was his Ph.D thesis, entitled *Perumals of Kerala* that elevated the stakes of Kerala historiography, which has covered a lot of ground on so many aspects of Medieval Kerala. While Elamkulam had only 25 inscriptions for his study of the Chera period, M.G.S could add another 125 to the list. Further, M.G.S also was able to correct the errors in some of the inscriptions and reinterpret certain others already used by Elamkulam. He could also make use of fresh archaeological sources for continuing his work on the Cheras. These initiatives have enabled him to challenge many of Elamkulam's hypotheses and revise the chronology of the rulers. Though he considered Elamkulam as his mentor, he had his own set of arguments to differ.

On the Chera line of rulers M.G.S pointed out that it was a misconception, naming the ruling house as the Kulasekhara dynasty since only a couple of the rulers had Kulasekhara as a suffix to their names. Further, he maintained that there was an impropriety in the use of the expression the 'Second Chera Empire' since it was much smaller in size and far less powerful when compared to the contemporary Hoysalas or the Cholas and that it can at best be called a kingdom. Nor would he consider the period of the Cheras as the Golden Age in the history of Kerala.

Some of his outstanding contributions with regard to the chronology of the Chera rulers from 800 to 1124, on the basis of corrected reading of the inscriptions as well the use of fresh epigraphic finds. The most significant contribution of M.G.S is the wealth of information drawn from inscriptions and other literary materials on the 'temple centered brahmin settlements' and the new agrarian order that crystallised in the arable areas of Kerala during the period of Cheras.

On the nature of the state, M.G.S did not consider the Chera kingdom as a centralised and bureaucratised state. Rather what he could discern were elements typically feudal. The ruler was the lord of Mahodayapuram and the overlord of Kerala. M.G.S also expounded the nature of institutions of the period such as the *salais*, matrilineal system, *devadasi* system etc. and examined the nature of cities, towns, and markets during the period.

His observations on some of the early settlements of the religious communities such as the Buddhists, Jains, Christians and Muslims in Kerala are significant. Their independent existence under the patronage of orthodox Hindu rulers were often discussed as instances of cultural synthesis. M.G.S finds no cultural synthesis or cultural fusion during the course of their interaction with the native community. M.G.S used the expression symbiotic to characterise the relationship.

The areas of his research were confined to the period of the Cheras or to Kerala. He has tried to bring out the nature of political institutions and practices in Tamilakam during the period of Sangam literature. Further, in the wider context of the eclipse of tribal oligarchies of the ancient period and the gradual emergence of new state machinery with the monarch

as the centre, he could compare the modes and relations of production in Deccan and South India. The antecedents of the *swaroopams* in Medieval Kerala and the functioning of the *sanketams* also have

been studied by M.G. S. The impact of the Mysorean rule in Malabar and the effect of the colonial phase in Kerala are some of the other themes over which he had made significant contributions.

## Recap

- ◆ K.P. Padmanabha Menon introduced systematic, chronologically consistent history writing.
- ◆ His major works are *Kochi Rajya Charithram* and *History of Kerala*.
- ◆ His posthumous work is *History of Kerala*, edited by T.K. Krishna Menon, based on notes on Jacobus Canter Visscher's *Letters from Malabar*.
- ◆ Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai's study on inscriptions led to the discovery of Cheras of Makotai.
- ◆ His major works are *Annathe Keralam*, *Leelathilakam*, *Studies in Kerala History*, and *Pandai Keralam*.
- ◆ He pioneered historical research on the Sangam period and Second Chera Empire.
- ◆ M.G.S. Narayanan disproved many of Elamkulam's hypotheses.
- ◆ He revised and updated the chronology for the Perumals of Makotai.
- ◆ His major work is *Perumals of Kerala*.

## Objective Questions

1. Which were the two important historical works of K.P. Padmanabha Menon?
2. Who was the celebrated historian and also father of K.P. Padmanabha Menon?
3. What is the major contribution of Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai in Kerala historiography?
4. In which discipline was Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai a professor?

5. How did Elamkulam label the Perumals?
6. What was the term used for the matrilineal system in Kerala?
7. What was the name coined by Elamkulam for the war between Cheras and Cholas?
8. Who is the author of *Perumals of Kerala* ?

## Answers

1. *Kochi Rajya Charithram* and *History of Kerala*
2. Shangunny Menon
3. Discovery of the Cheras of Makotai
4. Malayalam
5. Second Cheras, or Kulasekharas
6. *Marumakkathayam*
7. Hundred Years War
8. M.G.S Narayanan

## Assignments

1. Discuss the historiographical contributions of K.P. Padmanabha Menon to the modern history of Kerala.
2. Discuss the contributions of Elamkulam to Kerala Historiography.
3. Critically evaluate Elamkulam's conclusions about the Perumals of Makotai.
4. Assess M.G.S Narayanan's book, *Perumals of Kerala*, as a groundbreaking work in the historiography of early Kerala.

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2. Gurukkal, Rajan, and Raghava Varier, *History of Kerala: Prehistoric to the Present*. Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2018.
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4. Menon, A. Sreedhara, *A Survey of Kerala History*, DC Books, Kottayam, 2019.
5. Narayanan, M. G. S., *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, Kerala Historical Society, Trivandrum, 1972.
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2. Menon, K. P. Padmanabha, *History of Kerala* (Vol. 1), Cochin Government Press, Ernakulam, 1924.
3. Narayanan, M. G. S., *Perumals of Kerala: Brahmin Oligarchy and Ritual Monarchy - Political and Social Conditions of Kerala under the Chera Perumals of Makotai (c. A.D. 800-A.D. 1124)*, Xavier Press, Calicut, 1996.



## Marxist Historiography

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be:

- ◆ introduced to the idea of Marxist perspective on Kerala history
- ◆ made aware of how marxist historians have been tracing the trajectory of societies
- ◆ familiarised with the nature of certain ideas, institutions, structures, relations and processes of the past societies in Kerala

### Prerequisites

In post-independence India, a new approach to history emerged, one that was strongly influenced by the writings of nationalist historians and shaped by an interest in Marxist theory. The term “Marxist phase” does not imply that all historians of this period were Marxists, but rather that many adopted a materialist methodology to interpret historical developments. This perspective viewed history, especially ancient history, through the lens of social science, drawing on Karl Marx’s philosophy, particularly dialectical materialism. At the heart of this approach was the focus on understanding how social and economic structures influenced historical change. Instead of seeking entirely new evidence, historians began reinterpreting existing sources by asking new, critical questions. This shift is most clearly reflected in the pioneering work of Damodar Dharmanand Kosambi, regarded as the founding figure of Marxist historiography in India. Following in this tradition, historians such as K.N. Panikkar, Rajan Gurukkal, and Raghava Varier emphasised the analysis of production relations to gain deeper insights into the historical processes shaping society.

# Keywords

Marxism, Relations of Production, Social History, Economic History

## Discussion

### 1.4.1 *Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhoomi* of E.M.S Namboodiripad

Elamkulam Manakkal Sankaran Namboodiripad (1909-1998), popularly known as E.M.S, was a Malayali-Indian statesman and a Marxist ideologue. Born into an adyan Nambudiri household in South Malabar, the young E.M.S received traditional education in Vedas before he was enrolled in modern, state-run school. In his youth E.M.S was associated with Yogakshema Sabha, the Nambudiri organisation that spearheaded reforms within the community. The scope of his public commitment went beyond the boundaries of community reform.

As a Congressman, E.M.S was active in the freedom struggle against the British. In the late thirties, he started to engage with the ideas of socialism, communism and Marxism which were to last for the rest of his life. The sustained intellectual engagement turned into political conviction as he became increasingly skeptical of Gandhian methods. In 1939, when the Congress Socialist Party broke ranks with the Congress to become the Communist Party of India, E.M.S was one among the leaders of the new party. After the independence and the reorganisation of states, E.M.S became the first Chief Minister of United Kerala as he headed the world's first elected communist government.

In the Malayali public sphere, E.M.S

was known for his oratorial skills and scholarship as much as for his political acumen. As a Marxist ideologue, E.M.S authored several books in English and Malayalam for the dissemination of Marxist ideas among the general public. In this endeavour, he also penned books on the history of India and more specifically on the history of Kerala, which scrutinised the past from a Marxian perspective. Some of his major publications in English include *National Question in Kerala* (1952), *Mahatma and His Ism* (1958), *Problems of National Integration* (1966), *Kerala Society and Politics: A Historical Survey* (1984), *A History of Indian Freedom Struggle* (1986), and *Reminiscence of an Indian Communist* (1987). His output in Malayalam was no less prolific. His contributions include *Onnekaal Kodi Malayalikal* (1946), *Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhumi* (1948), *Keralathile Deshiya Prashnam* (1955), *EMS Athmakatha* (1970). Among these works *Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhumi* was the first conscious attempt to incorporate the principles of historical materialism and methods of Marxist historiography into the study of Kerala history.

First published in 1948, *Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhumi* was EMS' first serious excursion into historiography. He applied the insights from Marxist theories of historical change to hypothesis a Malayali identity based on a common mother tongue, Malayalam, a common motherland, Kerala, and a synthesis of

cultures, Aryan and Dravidian. Unlike the ideologues of the Dravidian movement in Tamilnadu, E.M.S argued that Brahmin immigrants from other parts of South India had a positive and substantial role in the emergence and development of Kerala. From the Marxist perspective, which advocated a succession of progressive stages in history, the immigration of Brahmins brought about a new stage in the civilisation and history of Kerala.

E.M.S rejected the *Keralolpathi*'s myth about the creation of Kerala; he accepted the contention of Dravidian ideologues; and he made such modifications as he thought was deemed necessary. The Anti-Brahmin Dravidian Movement had asserted that before the arrival of Aryans from the north, the south had a splendid culture which evolved among the indigenous Dravidians. The Aryan invasion devastated the indigenous civilisation, subjugated its people and foisted their culture upon them. E.M.S, on the contrary, hypothesised a more gradual transformation that came about. It happened on the basis of mutual cooperation, exchange of ideas and adoption of each other's beliefs. E.M.S argued that there was no large-scale destruction of the earlier civilisation, or subjugation of indigenous people, at least in Kerala. This was amply proved by the survival of several non-Brahmanical beliefs and practices including that of matriliney among Nairs of Kerala. Instead of proceeding to destroy the local cultures, the patrilineal Brahmins learned to adapt and made adjustments with the land and its people. For example, the patrilineal nambudiris maintained marriage-like liaisons known as *sambandham* with the women of Nair household.

Nonetheless, E.M.S' thesis of synthesis of cultures did not hide his bias towards

the Brahmins. The Brahmins introduced a more advanced stage of civilisation marked by an agriculture-based productive economy and a shift from polygamous matriliney to monogamous patriliney. Through a creative misreading of Frederick Engels, as Dilip Menon has shown, E.M.S interpreted the shift from mother-right to father-right as a progressive step. He went on to write that local communities which were influenced by Brahmins adopted the patriliney and father-right whereas those who were not influenced by them continued with the mother-right. E.M.S made a subtle hint about the link between socio-economic status of communities and their inheritance pattern when he commented that matrilineal castes were socially and economically backward.

Despite his contributions to the scholarship, E.M.S's works have come to be critically re-evaluated for their implicit and unqualified assumptions. The more recent example of this sort of critical appraisal of E.M.S is Dilip Menon's essay, "*Being a Brahmin the Marxist Way: E.M.S Namboodiripad and the Pasts of Kerala.*"

In his book, *Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhoomi* E.M.S examined the history of Kerala from a Marxist perspective and tried to analyse the social transition in terms of '*Jati-Janmi-Naduvazhi Medhavithvam*'. This means that the social formations were based on the upper caste.

He held that the upper caste determined the social relation, while the *janmi* or landlord determined the production relations and naduvazhis controlled the administration. The characterisation of '*Jati-Janmi-Naduvazhi Medhavithvam*' is considered as the notion of complex pre-capitalist social formations.

### **1.4.2 Kerala Charithram by Rajan Gurukkal and M.R Raghava Varier**

*History of Kerala: Prehistoric to Present* by Rajan Gurukkal and M.R Raghava Varier covers the early history of Kerala to the present period. The work was considered as a 'text book at the undergraduate level' by the authors themselves.

The book covers the events in chronological order to understand the material process of each epoch. The book largely covers the history of agrarian settlements, the role of principalities in the political and economic history, the agrarian expansion of medieval period, inland and overseas trades, the arrival of Europeans and their trading relations, and British domination of Kerala history and proceed to issues connected with the making of modern Kerala.

The work followed the method of analysing the material progress of the society first and then explained these production relations in terms of the society. However, the narrative is not intended for explaining society's social, economic, political, and cultural aspects as done in books of the earlier period.

The work utilised recent researches and debates of historians in the volume. It highlights the variations in opinions among historians on specific issues. Along with conventional sources, the authors have used tools from anthropology and social theory to understand social processes, emphasising the importance of interdisciplinary perspective in historical contemplation.

History, according to them, is not the chronological record of events or its narration based on facts. Instead, they

observed 'history unveils the principles that connect to the whole'. They observe that there is no history without theory and the only theory of history is historical materialism. Influenced by Marxist perspectives, both opined that "history is the history of material processes of change in means, forces and relations of production." However, they have gone beyond the conventional Marxist historical explanations centering modes of production to the social formation perspective.

They concluded that the history of Kerala denotes social formations and social transformations from a primitive society to a capitalist-oriented society. These transformations were motivated by the development and inconsistencies in the economy. The social relations emanated from such economic changes eventually led to disagreement and protest against the feudal or colonial system.

### **1.4.3 Keralathinte Innalekal by K.N.Ganesh**

K.N.Ganesh is one of the notable Marxist historians who critiqued the conventional notion of glorifying political history and the past. He conceived that the real understanding of a society is possible only by knowing man's interaction in society and the environment.

*Keralathinte Innalekal* by K.N.Ganesh is an attempt to find out the past of Kerala in terms of economic transactions and their interaction with nature and man of the period. The economic and cultural history of Kerala has been the subject matter of the study. He has dealt with the sources with utmost care to trace the trajectory of human development in terms of their economic activity. Therefore, the main focus of the work was a societal study based on the economic transaction.



The work evaluates the factors that have made possible the physical life and social relations of Kerala. Unlike the conventional historians, he examined the distribution and production as the expression of the given period. Studying history from the available sources is not deemed sufficient to understand a social arrangement. Ganesh articulated that a multi-disciplinary study including geography, resources, climate, knowledge system, technology and lifestyles are needed for comprehending the past.

Ganesh viewed that political history is not fully sufficient to understand how people lived in an area. The interaction of people with the economy is, therefore, an important aspect of inquiry. Based on the production relation, the interaction of labour category is considered for the

creation of the social history of Kerala.

The book showcased the transition from tribal society to the present in terms of production relations. Ganesh points out that the conditions for the pre-existing production forces and the social conditions determine the development of the people in the area.

The complex social relation led to the transition from tribal to the feudal system. In a feudal society, the caste system was a factor in maintaining social order. The changes in feudal order brought changes in the caste system in the later period. This has brought changes in the context of the production and distribution system of medieval Kerala. Kerala was, therefore, going through a period of transition to a global capitalist system like in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## Recap

- ◆ E.M.S Namboodiripad was influenced by the ideology of Marxism and Socialism.
- ◆ His book *Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhoomi* (1948) incorporated Marxist principles and historical materialism to study the history of Kerala.
- ◆ E.M.S argued for a gradual and cooperative cultural transformation between Aryan Brahmins and indigenous Dravidians, rather than a destructive Aryan invasion.
- ◆ Marxist historians understand the past in terms of production relations.
- ◆ The interaction of the working class in the economy is significant.
- ◆ The complex social relation of the medieval period brought changes in production and distribution.
- ◆ Rajan Gurukkal and M.R Raghava Varier presented a chronological history of Kerala, from prehistoric times to the present, through their work *Kerala*

*Charithram.*

- ◆ The book emphasises the material processes of each epoch and the role of agrarian settlements, principalities, trade, and colonial impact on Kerala history.
- ◆ Influenced by Marxist perspectives, the authors argue that history is driven by changes in production means, forces, and relations, viewing Kerala history as a series of social formations and transformations.
- ◆ They highlight economic development and inconsistencies as drivers of social change, leading to protests against feudal and colonial systems.
- ◆ Through the work *Keralathinte Innalekal*, K.N. Ganesh emphasises the importance of economic transactions and environmental interactions in understanding Kerala history.
- ◆ The book examines the factors enabling physical life and social relations, focusing on production and distribution systems.
- ◆ It highlights the transition from tribal to feudal societies and the role of caste in maintaining social order.
- ◆ It also points out Kerala's transition towards a global capitalist system by the 18th century.

## Objective Questions

1. What was the main focus of work *Keralathinte Innalekal*?
2. Who was the author of *Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhoomi*?
3. Which organisation was E.M.S Namboodiripad associated with in his youth?
4. Who wrote *Keralathinte Innalekal*?
5. What methodological perspective do Rajan Gurukkal and M.R Raghava Varier claim to use in their historical analysis of Kerala?
6. Who authored the work *Reminiscence of an Indian Communist* (1987)?
7. Which ideas influenced E. M. S. Namboodiripad in his works?

8. What kind of society transition does K.N. Ganesh describe in *Keralathinte Innalekal*?
9. How did E.M.S Namboodiripad view the interaction between Aryan Brahmins and indigenous Dravidians in Kerala?
10. What was the key factor of social formation according to E.M.S?

## Answers

1. Socio-economic history and production relation
2. E.M.S Namboodiripad
3. Yogakshema Sabha
4. K.N. Ganesh
5. Historical materialism
6. E.M.S Namboodiripad
7. Socialism and Marxism
8. The transition from tribal societies to feudal systems and eventually to a global capitalist system
9. A gradual and cooperative cultural transformation rather than a destructive Aryan invasion
10. Upper caste domination

## Assignments

1. Discuss the contributions of E.M.S. to Kerala Historiography.
2. Assess the contributions of K.N. Panikar in the Marxist historiography of Kerala.

3. Discuss the impact of Marxist historiography on the study of Kerala history.
4. Analyse the interdisciplinary approach used by Rajan Gurukkal and M.R Raghava Varier in *Kerala Charithram*. How does this approach enhance our understanding of Kerala's historical processes?
5. Evaluate K.N. Ganesh's critique of conventional political history in *Keralathinte Innalekal*. How does his focus on economic transactions and environmental interactions provide a different perspective on Kerala's past?

## Suggested Reading

1. Gurukkal, Rajan, and M.R. Raghava Varier, *History of Kerala: Prehistoric to the Present*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2018.
2. Panikkar, K.N., *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar*, Oxford University Press, 1989.

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1. Namboodiripad, E.M.S., *Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhumi*, Chinda Publication, 1948.
2. Ganesh, K. N., *Keralathinte Innalekal*, Kerala Bhasha Institute, Trivandrum, 2018.
3. Gurukkal, Rajan, and M.R. Raghava Varier, *Kerala Charithram*, Vallathol Vidhyapeedam.



## Recent Researches

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be:

- ◆ familiarised with the recent perspectives in historical writings on Kerala
- ◆ introduced to the strategies and techniques of the practitioners and to extend the areas of enquiry
- ◆ able to evaluate the significance of local history and oral traditions in understanding the broader historical context of Kerala

### Prerequisites

The study of Kerala history has undergone significant transformation in recent decades. This evolving approach has not only introduced new questions but also brought greater attention to previously overlooked or marginalised issues. Many of these are fundamental in nature and pose pressing challenges for contemporary historians. One of the most positive developments in Indian historiography has been the rise of Dalit and women's history. Dalit historiography challenges the traditional dominance of upper castes, while women's history questions patriarchal norms and male-centered narratives. Additionally, since the late twentieth century, there has been a growing emphasis on local history. Scholars have increasingly focused on micro-regions and local issues that were previously excluded from mainstream historical discourse, leading to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of the past.

### Keywords

Dalit History, Gender History, Local History, Oral History, Caste system, Patriarchy

# Discussion

## 1.5.1 Dalit Perspectives

A simple definition of the term history is ‘study of the past’ and what we learn in our schools and colleges are the rise and fall of empires, wars, erection of great monuments, victory of the kings and queens and so on. But why is it always about the elite classes? Does this mean that there were only elite classes during that period? Of course not. There were common people like peasants, traders, sculptors, soldiers etc. who died for their land. But there is hardly any mention about them in contemporary records. If we closely examine these texts, it is obvious that they were written for certain groups of readers.

During early periods, historians concentrated on the traditional political, economic and diplomatic topics. Later, scholarly interests shifted to social and cultural fields. There are a variety of historiographies like Nationalist, Marxist, and so on. However, none of them felt the need to bring to fore the problems regarding the history of the ‘Untouchables’.

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule used the word ‘*Dalit*’ in the 1880s to represent the outcasts, or people outside the *varna* system. This term was widely used by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and popularised by the Dalit Panther movement in the 1970s. Dalit literature is an uprising against the biased Brahmanical literature and depicts the sustained injustices and sufferings that had been endured by these marginalised groups for generations.

The Dalit perspective seeks to study the society, power, politics, culture, religion, art and linguistics relating to the Dalits for exploring the possibility of creating

a ‘snowball effect’ and inspire oppressed communities elsewhere. The premise is that they are original people and their study needs an original approach. A case in point is the story of Chokhamela, a Maharashtrian saint who lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> century who belonged to the Mahar caste, one of the untouchable castes. He wrote *Abhangas* (devotional poetry) during the course of the Bhakti movement in North India. In spite of his penetrating observations on the caste discriminations and exploitation, no exclusive and focused studies have been taken up hitherto. Similar writings on the Dalits might have existed from earlier centuries too.

It is argued that Dalit history and historiography are essential for challenging other Indian historiographic approaches which have left out Dalit themes and their contributions and so too their voices from the mainstream studies. Dalit history is therefore seen as the platform to analyse the Dalit social movements, their leaders, culture, etc. and to reconstruct the history from the Dalit point of view.

One of the pioneers of Dalit history is Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. In his works, he emphasised the struggles of the oppressed communities and criticised Brahmanical dominance in the process of the making of history.

As we noted, the dominant historiography has often overlooked the position of Dalits and other marginalised sections of society. However, it was a turning point in the historiography of Kerala that was set by T. H. P. Chenthassery, Dalitbandhu N. K. Jose, and P. K. Balakrishnan. T.H.P Chenthassery has produced biographical studies on Ayyankali, Pampady John Joseph, and

Poykayil Appachan. In his works, he critically analyses their contributions to the upliftment of the Dalit community. Chenthalassery's historical works include *Kerala Charitram Sathyavum Mithyayum*, *Charitrathile Avaganikapetta Edukal*, and *Kerala Charitram: Oru Mukhavura*. These works attempt to explore the history of Dalits and the development of social stratification in Kerala. Recently, numerous studies on Dalits have been published including P. Sanal Mohan's work titled *Modernity of Slavery: Struggles against caste inequality in Colonial Kerala*., K. S. Madhavan's work *Dalits and Discourses of Anti-caste Movements in Kerala* and Vinil Paul's works such as *Adima Keralathinte Adrushya Charithram* and *Dalit Charithradamsanam*.

P.K.Balakrishnan in his book *Jativyavasthayum Kerala Charithravum* criticises Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai and A. Sreedhara Menon by rejecting the glorified chapters of Kerala history because of the absence of reliable sources. In *Kerala Charithravum Samooha Roopikaranavum*, K. K. Kochu mentions the influence of Brahmanism and cultural changes that had happened in the history of Kerala and critically evaluates many theories regarding the caste system from the point of view of the oppressed classes. Kaviyur Murali in his work *Dalit Sahithyam* observes that according to neo-Dalit historians, Kerala history can be divided into four phases as primitive communism, slave system, capitalist system and socialist system.

### 1.5.2 Gender Perspectives

Kerala has always been in the spotlight for having accorded importance to women and their writings. Many historians who have inquisitively studied the past and have attempted to include sections that talk about the state of women in general.

Many critics of history have rightly identified the term history as the story of 'his' and not 'hers'. At a particular point of time, historians all over the world recognised the need to incorporate the stories and life of women, once ignored and neglected. As far as the state of Kerala is concerned, Kerala never had a shortage of accomplished women and stories about them that often-enthralled readers.

It was the women of Kerala themselves, who made the first attempt to write about their lives, desires and ambitions in a male-dominated society of their time. Though *Marumakkathayam* was prevalent, the system of *Makkathayam* had set in and women were often restricted to the spaces they were often assigned to, the kitchen, most of the time. In Kerala, writers like Balamaniyamma, Madhavikatty, Lalithambika Antarjanam, M. K. Saraswatiyamma and Sarah Joseph, were some of the writers who transformed the literary landscape by writing the lives of women and their suffering.

Lalithambika Antarjanam pursued the case of young Namboothiri women who had to get married to much older men at a very young age. She beautifully captures their eventful lives, their emotions and the pain inflicted upon by the relationship in her famous novel, *Agnisakshi*.

Kamala Surayya, popularly known as Madhavikatty penned down on female sexuality and the innermost desires of women in a series of works, including her autobiography, *Ente Katha*. Though these works were branded controversial, she made an effort to shatter age-old stereotypes that were implanted in the minds of people.

Saraswatiyamma, the harbinger of feminism in literature had evoked interest in the issues of women and their right

to freedom in her most acclaimed work, *Premabhajanam*.

T. P. Rajalekshmi through her works, 'Makal', 'Adhyapika Jeevikunnu' narrates the pain and suffering women had to endure throughout their lives and how they longed for affection and protection from someone. Sarah Joseph, revolutionised the literary scene with her writings, 'Aalahayude Penmakkal', 'Othappu', strongly objecting male dominance in literature and highlighting issues faced by the womenfolk. K.R. Meera in her work 'Aarachar', talks about a young woman who takes up the profession of an 'aarachar' (hangwoman).

There are a handful of historians in Kerala who made feminism their forte. Robin Jeffrey had given the necessary impetus to the writing of feminist history by bringing to focus the role played by women in Kerala. This is found to have surpassed most of the Human Development Index (HDI) indicators. His work, 'Politics, Women and Well-Being' delves into how women were instrumental in transforming Kerala into one of the best states in India.

Another writer of importance is J. Devika who authored several works and articles discussing gender issues in Kerala society. She elaborates how women enjoyed a sense of independence decades before with the existence of *Marumakkathayam* and family structure. J. Devika articulates her observations in 'Kulastreeyum Chantapennum Udayathenganne?' on how women of Kerala were chained to certain cultural, social and historical contexts and without the reconstruction of such ideologies, women were destined to lives of restriction, inequality and tradition. Females were often associated with the concept of beauty and mannerisms that hindered her choice to widen her dreams

and desires. She looks into how women have been actively participating in local self-governments and what impact it has been able to create in society.

G. Arunima has also carved a niche in history by her illustrious work, 'There Comes Papa: Colonialism and Transformation of Matriliney in Kerala, Malabar', c.1850-1940. It examined the changes in the system of matriliney over the centuries and how family, gender, caste and sexuality were affected by it. It was the first and foremost study in matriliney in Nair community.

One of the modern historians who narrates history in a unique manner, Manu S. Pillai has struck a chord with the general reading public. Known for his inclusion of accomplished women which are often neglected in mainstream history narratives, Manu S. Pillai makes an effort to trace the lives of women through their own perspective. One of the most fascinating stories is that of 'Muddupalani', a courtesan who lived at the court of Thanjavur. She was known for her controversial poems on desires and what love was all about. Since, her poems became the talk of the town, the locals called her Muddu Palani to pass her off as a man as her poems weren't acceptable as per social norms. Despite the problem's life threw at her, Muddupalani was rich enough to appease the scholars and poets with gifts and was the heroine of many epics written during the time.

Manu S Pillai has authored several works, 'The Ivory Throne: Chronicles of the House of Travancore,' 'Rebel Sultans: The Deccan from Khilji to Shivaji' and 'The Courtesan, The Mahatma and The Italian Brahmin.' Sethu Lakshmi Bai, the regent of Travancore was the protagonist of his first work and many more women figure in his narrative. In many aspects,



Manu S. Pillai has centered his writings on gender and roles played by women.

### 1.5.3 Local History

Local history in Kerala has been a relatively recent form of history. Local history or regional history stressed on gaining a better understanding of total history, the history of the entire land. Oral histories, legends, myths, eyewitness accounts, local artefacts, archival materials, and souvenirs were commonly used in tracing local history. Local history analysed how these source materials would provide insights on the society and culture of a particular locality or region. Local history made an inquiry into the cultural and social aspects of a locality, rather than the political aspects.

Kerala witnessed the emergence of local history for the first time when some Panchayats documented their histories as a part of the Period Planning initiative in 1997. It was the local people who conducted research about monuments, artefacts, institutions, organisations, geographical features etc. in their locality. Since local residents and inhabitants had proficiency in the local language and as they could easily access available resources, the locals themselves led the initiatives in writing local history.

Today, local history is mostly researched by amateur historians and local historical groups. Local historians, associations and historical groups have turned successful in bringing fewer known facts to the forefront by documenting and publishing local histories. It was Pallikkonam Rajeev and other members of Nattukootam, a historical group based in Kottayam who uncovered information on Elanthakalari, a Dutch school established to teach foreign languages to students. Dutch, Latin, Sanskrit and Malayalam were taught to the students of this school. This

school was believed to have facilitated communication between the Dutch and the local community. Universities like Thunchath Ezhuthachan University have opened heritage museums in Kerala which showcase agricultural implements, kitchen utensils, coins and exhibits related with the evolution of Malayalam language. This was one of the initiatives taken by the University to impart knowledge on local history and culture. The museum shares information on Vettath Grama Panchayath, where Vettathunadu existed and that the ruler, Vettathu Nadu Raja had made remarkable innovations in Kathakali.

Heritage walks are conducted in Trivandrum, Kottayam and other districts as initiatives to share knowledge on local history to the public and document regional history. Bina Thomas Tharakan, Malayinkil Gopalakrishnan, Hemachandra Nair, and Sharat Sunder Rajeev were prominent members of Heritage Walk Trivandrum. Heritage walk Kottayam was an initiative led by Pallikonam Rajeev. Johann Binny Kuruvilla has also made a drive called Kochi Heritage Project, to document the local history and heritage of Kochi. Family members have made efforts to collect and compile history about their respective families and present details of their ancestry as well as their reminiscences. Moreover, Kerala Council for Historical Research has encouraged documenting local histories of cities, institutions, communities, families, regions, etc.

An important component in local history is oral traditions, which are not available as documentary. Moreover, there are local myths, legends etc. which were part and parcel of the life of each locality. Though local history suffered shortcomings of authenticity and objectivity, these local histories were deeply entrenched in the pages of Kerala history.

Numerous works on local histories have been published recently including *Vaniyamkulam Panchayat Vijnaneeyam* compiled by N. M. Namboodiri and published by KCHR. Also, the histories of Avanisseri (Thrissur), Valayanchirangara (Ernakulam), the local histories of Madikkai (Kasargod), Ajanur (Kasargod), Payyannur (Kannur), Tirurangadi (Malappuram), and Chenganasseri (Kottayam) have been published. Certain works on local history include P. Sivadasan's monograph *Local*

*History of Kerala: Transdisciplinary Investigations at Parambathu Kavu Irumpilliyyam Malappuram District, K.* N. Ganesh's *Socio-cultural Processes and Livelihood Patterns at Tirurangadi- A Micro Historical Study*, K. N. Panikkar's *Pradesam, Rashtram, Lokam Kadathanaadinte Sahityaparambaryam* and J. Devika's *Land, Politics, Work and Home-Life at Adimalathura: Towards A Local History*.

## Recap

- ◆ Dalit historiography narrates the history from the perspective of Dalits.
- ◆ ‘Dalit’ is a term used by Jyotiba Phule and B.R Ambedkar to refer to Untouchable castes.
- ◆ Untouchable castes were outside the four-fold order of chaturvarnya.
- ◆ Gender History explores the theme of gender in history, primarily women.
- ◆ Ecriture Feminine- women writing about their lives and experiences.
- ◆ Robin Jeffrey, the historian who wrote about the central role of women in Kerala’s development.
- ◆ Local History is an in-depth investigation of history at the local level.
- ◆ Sources of Local History include oral accounts, eyewitness accounts, local artefacts etc.
- ◆ Local History focuses on social and cultural aspects of the locality.
- ◆ *Nattukoottam* is a local history group based in Kottayam.
- ◆ Oral Traditions provide importance to non-documentary sources like myths, legends, and eyewitness accounts in constructing local histories.

## Objective Questions

1. Who is the author of '*Jathivyavasthayum Keralacharithravum*'?
2. Who is the author of '*Keralacharithravum Samooharoopikaranavum*'?
3. Who wrote *Kerala Charitram Sathyavum Mithyayum*?
4. Who wrote *Socio-cultural Processes and Livelihood Patterns at Tirurangadi- A Micro Historical Study*?
5. Who is the author of '*Kulastreeyum Chantapennum Udayathenganne*'?
6. Which university maintains a heritage museum?

## Answers

1. P.K. Balakrishnan
2. K.K Kochu
3. T.H.P Chentharassery
4. K.N. Ganesh
5. J. Devika
6. Thunchath Ezhuthachan University

## Assignments

1. Discuss the influence of Dalit history in the Kerala historiography.
2. Discuss the role of Dalit historiography in reshaping historical narratives in Kerala. How do the works of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and other Dalit scholars contribute to this field?

3. Analyse the contributions of women writers in Kerala to feminist historiography. How have their works influenced the understanding of gender roles in Kerala's history?
4. Evaluate the significance of local history in the broader context of Kerala's historical studies.

## Suggested Reading

1. Anilkumar, T.K., *Dalit Sahithyam Charithravum Varthamanavum*, Kerala Sahithya Academy, Thrissur, 2018.
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3. Kochu, K.K., *Kerala Charithravum Samooha Roopikaranavum*, Kerala Bhasha Institute, Trivandrum, Kerala, 2016.
4. Balakrishnan, P.K., *Jathi vyavasthayum Kerala charithravum*, D.C. Books, Kottayam, 2004.



# Geography and Prehistory





## Mountains and Passes

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ understand the geographical significance of the Western Ghats and how they contributed to Kerala's historical and cultural distinctiveness
- ◆ recognise the strategic importance of the major mountain passes and their role in trade, invasion, and cultural exchange
- ◆ assess the influence of geographical features like mountains, rivers, and climate on Kerala's early societal practices and cultural evolution

### Prerequisites

The geographical features of Kerala, especially the Western Ghats, have significantly influenced its history, culture, and identity. This mountain range, forming the eastern boundary of the state, acted as both a protective barrier and a source of rich natural resources, shaping Kerala's relative isolation and unique socio-cultural evolution. The difficult terrain limited external influences, enabling the development of distinct practices such as matrilineal inheritance and a slow integration of major religious ideologies. At the same time, natural passes like the Palakkad Gap and others facilitated limited but impactful connections with neighbouring regions, enabling trade, cultural exchange, and even invasions by South Indian powers such as the Cholas, Pandyas, and Mysore rulers. Ancient references to Kerala in inscriptions and classical texts underscore its historical importance, while the landscape—marked by mountains, rivers, and backwaters—continues to define its cultural identity as “God's Own Country.”

# Keywords

Western Ghats, Palakkad Gap, Mountains and Hills, Flora and Fauna, Arabian Sea, *Marumakkathayam*

## Discussion

### 2.1.1 Western Ghats and 'Isolation' of Kerala

The journey from any part of the neighboring states, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, will give an idea of the difficulties encountered in crossing over to Kerala because of the mountain range on the eastern boundary, known as the Western Ghats or Sahyadri. It played an important role in determining the state's history. While the difficult terrain offered protection to the region, the forest cover of the Ghats remained an invaluable resource throughout history. The clamor for the protection of the Western Ghats might sound ironic since it is the same forest cover on the Western Ghats which has been protecting and sustaining Kerala for centuries. The rich flora and fauna of the Western Ghats is unparalleled and was well recognised by the world from ancient times. All the rivers in Kerala originate from the Western Ghats and they irrigate the midlands and the plains all along their course to the Arabian Sea.

There are many theories regarding the origin of the name 'Kerala'. The most popular argument is that the name 'Keralam' would mean 'land of coconut trees' (*kera vrikshams*). Another view is that 'Keralam' means 'the land of *Cheras*'-*Cheralam*. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer is of the view that before the introduction of English education, the land was known as Malayalam. But there are inscriptions bearing the words '*Cheralam*', '*Chaeralan*', and '*Keralan*' to indicate 'Keralam'. The

earliest mention of the name 'Kerala' can be found in the Asokan inscriptions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Rock Edicts II and XIII make mention of 'Keralaputras' to denote the ruling families of Kerala. Kalidasa's '*Raghuvamsam*', Megasthenes's '*Indica*', Pliny's 'The Natural History', Ptolemy's 'Geography' Cosmas Indicopleustes's 'Christian Topography' etc. are some of the works which mention Kerala in the early periods. In the later periods, Marco Polo, Ibn Batuta, Niccoli Conti, and Abdul Razak also refer to the region. Other than this, there are different arguments regarding the origin of the word '*Malabar*'.

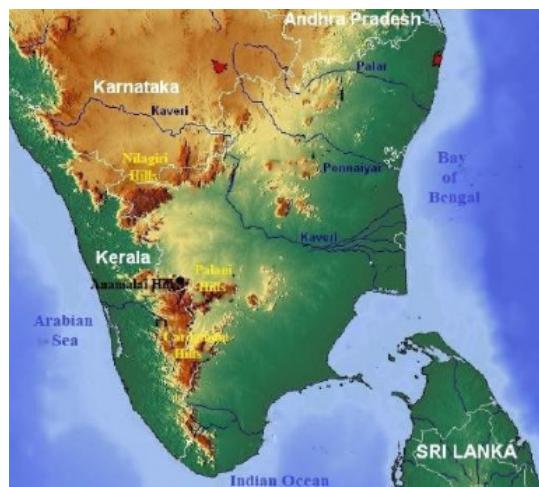
The mountains, backwaters, valleys, hills, rivers and the climate may provide ample justification to the magical tagline 'God's own country'. This gives a pleasant climate, copious rain and prevents the dry winds from the north which would have made this a dry land. This division also led to the emergence of a unique practice like the matrilineal system of inheritance (*Marumakkathayam*), polyandry and the slow penetration of Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism into the Kerala culture compared to the other parts of peninsular India. In addition to these, the distinctive style of art and architecture has also evolved because of this isolation.

### 2.1.2 Mountains and Hills

The Western Ghats stretches from Dang forest in Gujarat up to Maruthva Mala in Kanyakumari district and lies along the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.



In Kerala, this range is mainly divided into four groups.



- 1. Nilgiri Mountains:-** Everyone must have heard about the Nilgiri mountain railway. As you can see in the map, it is in the confluence of Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
- 2. Anamalai Hills:-** The highest peak in Southern India, Anamudi situated in Anamalai hills.
- 3. Palani Hills:-** Towards the east of Anamalai hills, lies the Palani hills and it is situated completely in Tamil Nadu.
- 4. Cardamom Hills:-** This is in the south of the Anamalai hills and extends up to the Aryankavu pass.

The mountains and hills have also played their part in shaping the history. The first human habitations are found to have started in the high ranges and later moved to the plains and coastal regions. Ezhimala, in the present Kannur district was the headquarters of the Mushika kingdom. Many hilly areas in the Malabar region had a significant role in the Pazhassi revolt against the British. These mountains

also have cultural importance as many pilgrimage sites are located in these hills and mountains like the Thirunelli temple in Wayanad, Sabarimala and the St. Thomas Church in Malayattur.

### 2.1.3 Palakkad Passes and Other Passes



It is true that the Western Ghats served as a natural barrier in 'isolating Kerala' from other states. But we also find that the Western Ghats had passes which connected Kerala with neighbours. These connections are quite evident in the language as Malayalam itself has influence from Tamil, Kannada and Sanskrit. But, how was it possible?

As pointed out, the Western Ghats have gaps and passes that helped in the inter-state contact. Through these passes the

armies Cholas and Pandyas, in the ancient time and Vijayanagara and Mysore rulers in the later periods had crossed over to Kerala for conquests. The Brahmins from the north played an important role in the establishment of the Hindu religion. Similarly, the caste system had been carried along by those who migrated to Kerala through the passes.

**Palakkad Gap** is the most important gap that connects Kerala with Tamil Nadu. It served as a main highway for Roman trade between Muziris and Arikamedu in the west and east coasts respectively touching industrial sites in the inlands of Tamil Nadu like Kodumanal and Karur. The Cholas and Pandyas invaded Kerala and Chera rulers conquered Kongu region through this pass.

**Bodinaykannur Pass**, currently located in the Theni district of Tamil Nadu, gives access to Madurai through the high ranges of Idukki.

**Kamban Pass** connects Thodupuzha

with Kambam in Theni district of Tamil Nadu and through this pass trade from Central Kerala takes place.

**Aralvaimozhi/Arambadi Pass** which connects Thiruvananthapuram and Tirunelveli is a strategically important one as many invasions from the East faced by the South Travancore rulers came through this pass. Venad rulers and later the kingdom of Travancore maintained a fort there to prevent invasions from the east. Presently this pass is situated in Kanyakumari district in Tamil Nadu.

**Aryankavu Pass** connects Sengottai with Kollam district. Britishers made transportation facilities to connect Kollam port with Tamil Nadu through this gap.

**Thamarassery Gap** gives access from Wayand to Mysore. Hyder Ali, Tipu Sultan and the Ikkeri Nayakas established their supremacy in Kerala through this pass.

**Perambadi Gap** connects Kannur with Coorg.

## Recap

- ◆ Western Ghats isolated and protected ancient Kerala
- ◆ Kerala mentioned in Ashokan inscriptions and classical texts
- ◆ Name ‘Kerala’ has various origin theories
- ◆ Western Ghats source all major Kerala rivers
- ◆ Mountains shaped climate, culture, and settlement
- ◆ Nilgiri Hills lie at Kerala’s northeastern border
- ◆ Anamudi peak is highest in South India
- ◆ Palakkad Gap vital for ancient trade routes

- ◆ Strategic passes enabled invasions and interactions
- ◆ Unique geography fostered matriliney and cultural distinctiveness

## Objective Questions

1. Which mountain range forms the eastern boundary of Kerala?
2. Which ancient emperor's inscriptions contain the earliest reference to Kerala?
3. The name 'Keralaputras' is found in which of Ashoka's rock edicts?
4. Which is the highest peak in Southern India?
5. Which pass connects Kerala with Madurai?
6. Which pass served as a Roman trade route between Muziris and Arikamedu?
7. The Thamarassery Gap connects Wayanad to which city?
8. The fort at Aralvaimozhi was maintained by which rulers to resist eastern invasions?
9. Which author mentioned Kerala in his work "Raghuvamsam"?
10. Which pass did Tipu Sultan and Hyder Ali use to enter Kerala?

## Answers

1. Western Ghats
2. Ashoka
3. Rock Edict II and XIII
4. Anamudi

5. Bodinaykannur Pass
6. Palakkad Gap
7. Mysore
8. Venad and Travancore
9. Kalidasa
10. Palakkad Gaap

## Assignments

1. Describe the role of the Western Ghats in shaping the history, climate, and culture of Kerala.
2. How did the geographical isolation caused by the Western Ghats influence the development of unique cultural practices in Kerala?
3. How did the Palakkad Gap facilitate trade and invasions in Kerala's history? Cite historical examples.
4. Analyse the role of different mountain passes in connecting Kerala with its neighboring states and their impact on political and religious exchanges.
5. Explain the different theories regarding the origin of the name 'Kerala'. Which is the most widely accepted, and why?

## Suggested Reading

1. Ganesh, K.N., *Keralathinte Innalakal*, Kerala Bhasha Institute, Thiruvananthapuram, 1995.
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## Arabian Sea and Overseas Contacts

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ♦ understand the role of monsoon winds in facilitating early seaborne trade and the development of Kerala as a spice trading centre
- ♦ identify the major ancient ports of Kerala and assess their significance in maritime trade networks
- ♦ analyse how Kerala's religious and cultural diversity evolved through interactions with various trading communities

### Prerequisites

The Malabar Coast of Kerala, famed for its spice trade since the 3rd millennium BCE, was a centre of international commerce due to its unique geography and monsoon winds. Pepper, termed 'black gold,' drew traders from Arabia, Phoenicia, China, Rome, and Greece, with Arabs and Phoenicians initially dominating the trade as navigational intermediaries. Kerala's dual monsoons—*Edavapathi* (south-west) and *Thulavarsham* (north-east)—enabled efficient sea travel, especially after Greek navigator Hippalus utilised these winds in 45 CE, opening direct trade routes that challenged Arab dominance. Major ancient ports like Muziris, Tyndis, Barace, and Nelcynda facilitated this commerce, with Muziris particularly noted in Roman and Sangam literature. The region's trade links extended to China and continued into the colonial era, with cities like Calicut and Cochin later rising in prominence. The flood of 1341 CE notably ended Muziris' dominance, leading to the emergence of Cochin as a major port.

### Keywords

Maritime trade, Spice Trade, Monsoon Winds, Roman coins, Muziris, Cultural Contact

## Discussion

### 2.2.1 Monsoon Winds and Seaborne Trade

Pepper is referred to as 'black gold' because of its value. In ancient times, it was worth more than gold. Malabar Coast was the only part of the world where pepper was grown for export at this scale.



Fig 2.2.1 Trade route

Kerala's spice trade dates back to the 3rd millennium BCE. It witnessed the arrival of the Arabs, Phoenicians, Chinese, Romans, Greeks and later the colonial powers for cardamom, pepper, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg and turmeric. Arabs and Phoenician had the monopoly in trade and the main intermediaries as only they knew the route to Kerala.

Kerala has two monsoons called *Edavapathi* and *Thulavarsham*. *Edavapathi* is the south-west monsoon which begins in early June which corresponds to the middle of the month of Edavam in the Malayalam Era, and it is the main rainy season. It is the result of the south west monsoon winds that Kerala gets rain in June. As Kerala lies in the windward side of the Western Ghats,

it is the first state to receive the monsoon rain. This ends by the end of September. The north-east monsoon from October to November, also known as retreating monsoon, is characterised by afternoon rainfall accompanied by thunder and lightning and is marked by high levels of humidity.



Fig 2.2.2 South-west Monsoon

These monsoon winds helped the sailors to sail through the sea easily and it was Hippalus, the Greek navigator in 45 CE who is said to have made use of the power of the south-west monsoon winds to reach the Malabar Coast. Pliny in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE speaks about a voyage of 40 days from Red Sea ports in Egypt to Muziris aided by the southwest monsoon. This helped the sailors to find the direct route from Persian Gulf to Muziris. It destroyed the domination of the Arabs in the Arabian Sea. The Romans and Greeks learned to make use of these monsoon winds for the spice trade in the beginning of Christian era.

Pliny, Ptolemy and the author of Periplus of Erythrean Sea made mention

of the ports and towns in Kerala. Most important ones are Muziris, Tyndis, Barace and Nelcynda. Exact location of any of these ports is not identified as yet.



Fig 2.2.3 North-east monsoon

**Muziris** was a trade hub in ancient

Can you imagine a temple dedicated to Roman emperor Augustus in Kerala? In the Purtiner Table a *Templum Augusti* (temple of Augustus) in Muziris is shown. The Purtiner Table is a Roman map of 13<sup>th</sup> century, copy of possible Roman original made in the 3rd century AD.

times. It is situated near the present day Kodungallur. The discovery of coin hoards suggests an inland trade link between Muziris and east coasts via Palaghat gap. The Sangam literature contains poetic descriptions of the arrival of Roman ships with gold and returning with pepper from Muziris.

**Tyndis** was mentioned in the *Periplus of Erythrean Sea* as a port located 500 stadia north of Muziris. This port is also referred to as Tondi in Tamil texts.

**Barace** is often identified as the present day Purakkad in Alappuzha district.

**Nelcynda** is also mentioned by Pliny and in the *Periplus of Erythrean Sea* as an inland port and as a great emporium.



Pliny refers to the drain of gold from Rome to India for the spices, especially pepper and other luxuries. Roman coin hoards discovered from many parts of Kerala seem to confirm this point. Some scholars suggest that the trade between Kerala and China started way before the Greeks and Romans, probably before the Christian era till the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In the later periods, Calicut, Cochin and Quilon became prominent and cities developed around these ports. Other than sea routes, land routes were also used for trade, but were not so prominent like the sea

routes. The flood of 1341 CE, that led to the demise of the most significant port of Muziris and the emergence of Cochin port. Marco Polo (13<sup>th</sup> century) referred to the trade in pepper and other spices from Kerala to Western Asia and China. There were many forts built by the rulers near to the sea which mainly served as warehouses rather than for military purposes.

## 2.2.2 Human Migrations

Some of the stock questions that are set around the issue of identity of any community and their region are the same.

Who were the original settlers? This question was raised with regard to Kerala. Proto Australoids and Negroids were considered as the races that came first in this land. These first settlers were known as '*Adi dravidars*'.

According to A. Sreedhara Menon, "The Negrito element is the earliest racial strain." The Kadar, the Kanikkar, the Malapandarams, the Muttuvans, the Ullatans, the Uralis, the Paniyas, etc., who live in the forests of Kerala even today are said to be representative of the Negrito type. Most of these tribes have curly hair, black skin, round head and broad nose and wear the comb in common with similar types in other parts of the world. The Negritos seem to have been replaced by the Proto-Australoids with their long head, flat nose and dark skin. This element is represented by such tribes as the Iruvans, Kurichiyyas, Karimpalans, Mala Arayans, Mala Vetans, etc. But some scholars reject the presence of Negroes based on their facial features.

K.K. Kochu in his book '*Kerala Charithravum Samoohika Roopikaranavum*', makes mention of the similarities of potteries unearthed from Travancore with the potteries from Egypt, Greece and Etruscan. They are painted pottery with handles and they do not resemble contemporary pottery found in Northern India.

The Brahmins of Kerala migrated from the North, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu in various groups and settled in different parts of the state forming 32 villages from about 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE and it completed in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Even though they had different physical features, religious faith, social customs and language, their unity and power helped them to dominate the early settlers and slowly Brahmanism overcame the Dravidian culture and

integrated them into the caste hierarchy. Towards the later period, Portuguese and other colonial powers entered into matrimonial alliances with native women, especially in the coastal areas resulting in the intermingling of races and they are known as Luso-Indians. Their population was quite high in Tangasseri, Kochi and Kannur regions. Marriage between Arabs and the local people resulted in the formation of Muslim Mappilas.

### 2.2.3 Cultural Contacts

Christianity and Islam made their way into India through Kerala mainly because of the tolerant attitude of the rulers. In ancient times, Buddhism and Jainism came to Kerala and co-existed along with the Dravidian culture. As in the case of the other parts of India, the influence of Brahmanism was so strong that it led to the deterioration of these religions and their places of worship became Hindu temples. Traders from the Middle East established their settlements here.

It is believed that the first church, mosque and synagogue in India were built in Kerala. Jews had trade relations even before their migration to Kerala. It is assumed that they landed here during the time of King Solomon more than 2000 years ago (586 BCE). There is also another view that the period of their arrival was as late as 70 CE. It is possible that the Jews came and settled down here at different periods as part of their trading activity. In 1948, when the state of Israel was born, most of them returned to their lands after mixing some of their cultural traits.

It is widely believed that the Christianity flourished here after the arrival of Saint Thomas in 52 CE and in the case of Islam, everyone must have known about the Cheraman Jumah Masjid, which is considered as the 'first mosque in Kerala'.

Kerala had trade relations with the Arabs even before the origin of Islam and many of them have settled down here as well. 'Arabi Malayalam' is a variant form of Arabic script and many literary works were written in this script including the '*Mappila Songs*'. Even though they followed Islamic traditions, its traits are basically common with almost all aspects of Kerala culture including beliefs, custom, thoughts, ideas, fantasy and so on. The adoption of matrilineal inheritance was followed by them mainly in the Malabar region and in some parts of southern Kerala. The early mosques have resembled the traditional Kerala

architectural style and this was continued till the invasion of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan during the 18th century in the Malabar area.

These religions and cultures influenced the language and also in the cuisine. The language of Malayalam includes loan words from other Indian languages like Sanskrit, Hindi, Marathi, and foreign languages like Persian, Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac, Portuguese, and so on. The influence of Chinese on Kerala is confirmed by the presence of such words like '*Cheena vala*', '*Cheena chatti*', '*Cheena Bharani*'.

## Recap

- ◆ Pepper was anciently valued more than gold
- ◆ Kerala's spice trade dates to 3rd millennium BCE
- ◆ Arabs and Phoenicians dominated ancient spice trade routes
- ◆ Kerala's two monsoons enabled effective maritime travel
- ◆ Muziris port thrived through Roman and Greek trade
- ◆ Hippalus utilised southwest monsoon to reach Malabar Coast
- ◆ First Kerala settlers were Negroids and Proto-Australoids
- ◆ Brahmins migrated and integrated Dravidian communities via caste
- ◆ Kerala hosted India's earliest mosque, church, synagogue
- ◆ Arabic, Chinese, Portuguese influenced Kerala's culture and language

## Objective Questions

1. What was pepper referred to as in ancient times due to its value?
2. Which coast was famous for large-scale pepper export?

3. Who were the first intermediaries in Kerala's spice trade?
4. Who used the South-West monsoon to reach the Malabar Coast in 45 CE?
5. What port did Pliny mention that traders reached in 40 days from Egypt?
6. Which port is mentioned in Tamil texts as "Tondi"?
7. Which is the first Mosque in Kerala?
8. Which script is used in 'Mappila Songs'?
9. Which Roman author mentioned voyages aided by monsoon winds?
10. Which cultural trait was adopted by Muslims in Malabar?

## Answers

1. Black Gold
2. Malabar Coast
3. Arabs and Phoenicians
4. Hippalus
5. Muziris
6. Tyndis
7. Cheraman Jumah Masjid
8. Arabi-Malayalam
9. Pliny
10. Matrilineal

## Assignments

1. Discuss the role of monsoon winds in facilitating the ancient maritime trade between Kerala and other civilizations. How did these winds shape trade routes and foreign relations?

2. Examine the importance of Muziris in ancient Kerala.
3. Evaluate the archaeological and literary evidence that supports Kerala's early trade relations with Egypt, Greece, and China.
4. Who were the earliest inhabitants of Kerala according to anthropological studies? Describe their racial features and tribal identities.
5. Discuss how foreign influences (Arab, Portuguese, and Chinese) have shaped Kerala's language, cuisine, and architecture. Provide specific examples.

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## Landscape and Settlement Pattern

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ understand the geographical divisions of Kerala—Highland, Midland, and Coastal Tract—and their influence on agriculture and settlement patterns
- ◆ explain the traditional land classification in Kerala such as *parambu*, *nilam*, and *purayidam*, and their significance in the region's agrarian structure
- ◆ analyse the evolution of settlement patterns in Kerala from the Neolithic period to early historical times

### Prerequisites

The geography and settlement patterns of Kerala are deeply influenced by its diverse topography, which comprises the highland, midland, and coastal tracts. The highlands, part of the Western Ghats and Deccan Plateau, are forested regions ideal for cultivating paddy, tea, coffee, spices, and rubber. The midlands, rich with hills and river valleys, support a variety of crops and were historically conducive to human settlements due to abundant water sources. The coastal lowlands are fertile and well-suited for paddy, coconut, fishing, and coir production, though they have experienced changes due to fluctuating sea levels. Kerala's unique settlement structures—such as the *parambu* (multi-crop farmlands), *purayidam* (compound gardens), and *nilam* (cultivated fields)—emerged from evolving agricultural practices and water management systems like *vay* and *chiray*. Historically, human habitation in Kerala began in the highlands over 25,000 years ago, with Neolithic migrants from neighbouring regions establishing kin-based settlements known as Urs. These communities, such as the Kuravar and Vedars, practiced diverse livelihoods including hunting and shifting cultivation. Over time, settlement expanded from the highlands to the midlands and coastal

Neytal zones, which became important centers for trade and fishing. Agricultural labour was rigidly structured along caste lines, notably involving the Pulaya community, whose immobility was institutionalized as part of Kerala's socio-economic order.

## Keywords

Highland, Midland, Coastal Land, *Parambu*, *Nilam*, *Purayidam*, *Pulam*, *Vay*, *Chiray*

## Discussion

### 2.3.1 Highland, Midland and Coastal Tract

The Highland region consists of the Western Ghats and it is the easternmost territory with thick vegetation and dense forest. The low plain of highland which is part of the Deccan Plateau is apt for paddy cultivation. The megalithic monument 'dolmen' can be seen in these areas. Many rivers originate from here and this area is ideal for the production of tea, coffee, spices and rubber.

The midland, runs along the central part of Kerala has valleys and hills and vast agricultural lands, where most of the cultivation of different crops takes place. Rivers are dividing this area, as they start from the high ranges and end in the sea.

The lowland is the coastal area which has lagoons like backwaters, lakes, rivers, etc. and this area is very fertile and perfect for paddy and coconut cultivation. Fishing and production of coir are also the main income of this area. We should also remember that the coastal area has changed in the course of time, with the difference in sea level.

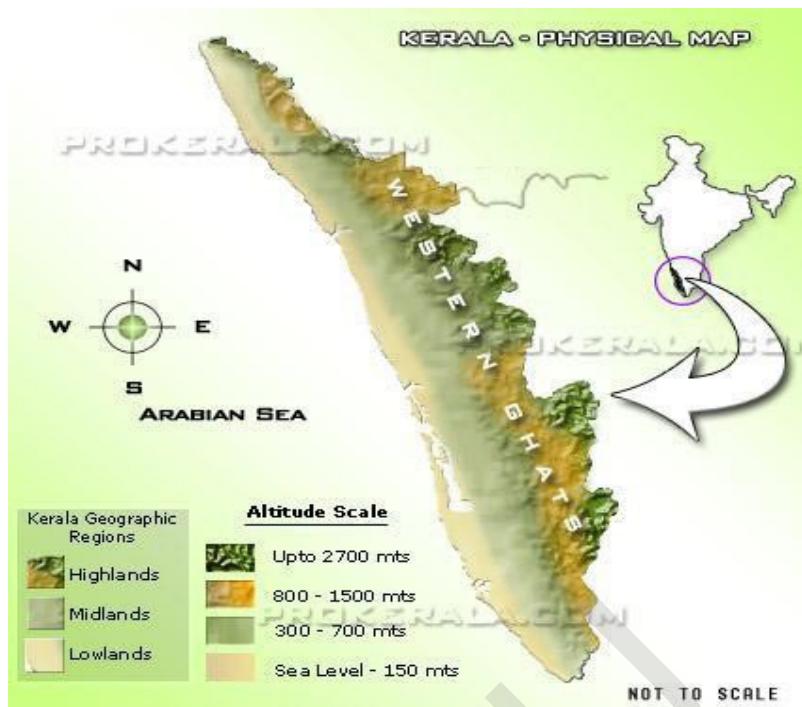
### 2.3.2 *Parambu*, *Nilam* and *Purayidam*

Kerala developed a unique kind of settlement pattern.

The terrain of the Midland was favourable to settlements due to the presence of natural watercourses such as rivers, rivulets, and streams, as well as wells and tanks. These areas are significant because of their laterite and alluvial terrain. The former is made up of *parambu* lands for mixed crops, where compound sites known as *purayidams* are also found.

Due to the spread of new settlements and the destruction of forest in this area, *parambu*, or mixed crop farming space, developed in the midland's laterite zones. *Parambu* is the term for the laterite region in the midlands used for multicrop farming. The *parambu* and *purayidams*, or compound sites, also show the dispersion of habitation. The epigraphical materials dating to the ninth century C.E. show the development of this procedure, which continued in the post-Sangam era. The names *parambu*, such as *puyaththu parambu* and *perumparambu*, refer to the mixed crop areas.

The people who settled in the highlands moved into the riverine areas, where



Source: Prokerala.com

they established new settlements. They invented many water management techniques. A channel known as *vay* was created in order to drain the water from rivers. In order to hold water for irrigation, *Chiray* was also constructed. Bunds were established in order to control water. A crucial water management system that removes excess water and stores it in reservoirs is the *Vay* and *Chiray* system. *Thodu* was a tiny stream that was often found close to areas that were fruitful, such as rice fields. New land areas were created and the process of reclaiming the land was known as *pulam*, ( the fertile arable agriculture tract). They utilised the *pulam* land for agricultural operations, particularly for paddy farming and this area of land became *nilam* or cultivated field.

*Purayidams*, or compound sites, are made up of rice fields and monocrop gardens like coconut. It also shows the growth of multicrop farming as well as the dispersion of habitation. In the *Ur* settlement, there are references to

two *purayidams*, or compound sites, indicating the presence of cultivator villages. The *purayidam* is made up of rice fields and monocrop gardens like coconut. The production and distribution of agriculture have been impacted by this spatial specialisation, which has also had an influence on the dispersed nature of settlement areas(urs). Nedumpuram Tali inscription mentions Ittiyaikadar and Narayanan Chaththan, which are linked to *purayidams* and indicate the settlement of cultivators engaged in production activities. The Chembra inscription also documents the cultivation of certain *purayidams*. It is also possible to spot *kulams*, *kinar*, and *chirai* close to the compound sites, or *purayidams*.

### 2.3.3 Habitation Pattern

Human settlement in Kerala began in the high mountains between 25,000 and 30,000 years ago. It is possible that Neolithic people migrated from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka to Kerala. Neolithic artefacts found in Kerala demonstrate how

the culture had clearly spread from the sites of the bordering states and developed here nearly simultaneously with the growth in other parts of South India.

Kerala's oldest kin-based village settlement, or *Ur*, first appeared during the Neolithic phase. These villages must have been home to the early Kerala populations who spoke Proto-Dravidian. After destroying the natural vegetation, the Neolithic people farmed the hills and slopes. They belonged to the descending group known as *Kuti*, divided into domestic divisions. Each *Ur* was an autonomous production unit that functioned as a self-sustaining system. *Kutis* gathered into self-sufficient groups led by their headmen. The seasons, precipitation patterns, and topography of Kerala's agro-climatic zones differed greatly from those of the rest of Tamil Nadu. There are significant variations in the types of agriculture practiced and labour techniques needed in these areas.

*Kurinji-Mullai* region refers to the wooded high ranges in the western part of the Western Ghats, where various livelihood types such as hunting, collecting, and shifting farming are found in the early historical time frame. *Kadu* was an agricultural tract, an essential component of the daily activities of the people who lived in forested areas. The people who lived in the high land zone are the ones who originated both monocrops, such as mountain paddy, and multicrops. In the mountainous and hilly-forested region, the Kuravar, *Vēdar*, and *Vīttuvar* clans turned to hunting and worked on changing agriculture practices.

The people in the highland region moved to the midland and they developed broad farming. They settled the area near water sources. *Kutis* and *ūrs* formed in the midland. The process by which

shifting cultivation extended to the raised areas and the hill slopes in the midland was the extension of agricultural practices from mountains and hills to the midlands and estuary area. Now, mountain paddy was being grown in the midland's elevated regions.

The *Ettutokai* texts describe the Western Sea and its coastal region. The writings refer to the littoral tracts as *Neytal*. It also describes the topography surrounding lakes, rivers, and backwaters, among other natural water sources. Since the early historical period, people have lived along the western coast. Panthar, Muciri and Thondi are mentioned as significant *Ur* settlements in this region. The sea resources had equal significance to those derived from the mountain. These seaside communities served as hubs for trade as well. The Paratavar and Umanar are the primary inhabitants of the coastal region, and their primary sources of income are fishing and salt production.

### 2.3.4 Pollution Rules

There were two seasonal harvests of paddy in a year, once in the *Kanni* (August–September) month and once in the *Makaram* (December–January) month. Throughout the year, labourers were required to be available for various duties like weeding, harvesting, threshing, seeding, transplanting seedlings, and ploughing. Each land required its own permanent workforce. As a result the technique of connecting tillers to the land became institutionalised.

Most of these tillers of immobility and enslavement were made up of the Pulaya community. Restrictions based on caste, such as untouchability, also existed. The Tiruvalla copper plates, the Thrikkakara temple inscription, and the Tarissappalli copper plates of Quilon recorded that the Pulayas transacted along with the



land. Additional labourers who worked in agriculture either directly or indirectly formed inherited occupational groups that were subjugated under the caste system. These organisations were connected to the settlement or village.

## Recap

- ◆ Highland region supports tea, coffee, spices, rubber farming
- ◆ Midland has valleys, rivers, and diverse crop cultivation
- ◆ Coastal lowlands ideal for paddy, coconut, and fishing
- ◆ *Parambu* lands used for mixed-crop farming midlands
- ◆ *Purayidam* sites show multicrop farming and settlements
- ◆ Water management used *vay*, *chiray*, *bund*, and *thodu*
- ◆ Early settlements began in Kerala's high mountains region
- ◆ Neolithic people practiced shifting agriculture in forested hills
- ◆ *Ur* villages were kin-based self-sustaining production units
- ◆ Coastal regions supported trade, fishing, and salt production
- ◆ Pulayas were bonded tillers under caste-based land system
- ◆ Caste restrictions and pollution rules shaped village life

## Objective Questions

1. Which region in Kerala is known for thick vegetation and dense forests?
2. What is the primary agricultural activity in Kerala's lowland region?
3. What is 'parambu' in the context of Kerala's settlement pattern?
4. What does the term 'purayidam' refer to?
5. What is the name of the small stream often found near paddy fields?
6. What is the purpose of the 'Chiray' in traditional water management?

7. Which type of land was reclaimed for agriculture and became known as ‘nilam’?
8. Which community primarily lived in the highland zones practicing hunting and shifting agriculture?
9. What is referred to as ‘Neytal’ in Ettutokai texts?
10. Which river management system helped drain and store water?

## Answers

1. Highland
2. Coconut and paddy farming
3. Mixed crop farming land in laterite zones
4. Compound site with rice fields and gardens
5. Thodu
6. To store water for irrigation
7. Pulam
8. Kuravar
9. Neytal
10. Vay and Chiray

## Assignments

1. Describe the geographical and agricultural features of the Highland, Midland, and Coastal Tracts of Kerala. How do these physical features influence the patterns of cultivation and livelihood in each region?
2. Explain the terms ‘Parambu’, ‘Nilam’, and ‘Purayidam’ in the context of Kerala’s historical land use and settlement patterns. How did these contribute

- to the development of agriculture in the midlands?
3. Discuss the water management systems used by early settlers in Kerala.
  4. Analyse the habitation patterns during the Neolithic phase in Kerala.
  5. What evidence from inscriptions supports the spread of cultivation and the development of purayidams in early Kerala? Cite examples.

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1. Menon.A. Sreedhara., *A Survey of Kerala History*, DC Books, Kottayam, 2019.
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2. Gurukkal.Rajan & Raghava Varier, *History of Kerala*, Orient Blackswan, Delhi, 2018.



## Rivers and Backwaters

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ identify the geographical features of Kerala such as rivers and backwaters
- ◆ explain the cultural and economic significance of rivers and backwaters
- ◆ examine the trade and transport systems in Kerala and their impact on regional and international cultural exchanges

### Prerequisites

Kerala's unique geography, characterised by short westward-flowing rivers, expansive backwaters, and a long coastline, has profoundly shaped its historical development, economy, and cultural identity. The region's rivers, though smaller in size, have played a central role in religious and cultural activities, as evidenced by festivals like Mamankam and the significance of rivers such as the Periyar and Bharathapuzha. The extensive network of backwaters served not only as a natural transportation system but also contributed to the region's distinctive hydrological environment. From ancient times, Kerala attracted traders from distant lands—Arabs, Jews, Romans, Persians, and Chinese—drawn primarily by its lucrative spice trade. These interactions fostered rich cultural exchanges, leading to the settlement of diverse communities such as Jews, early Christians, and Muslims along the Malabar Coast. In addition to trade, Kerala was also a center for religious activity and transformation, witnessing the rise and decline of Buddhism and Jainism and the subsequent revival of Hinduism under figures like Adi Shankara. Thus, Kerala's geography served as a dynamic conduit for economic activity and cultural fusion, linking it to both the East and the West throughout its early history.

## Keywords

Rivers, River bank, Backwater, Lake, Canals, Dams, festivals

## Discussion

### 2.4.1 Rivers of Kerala

The Rivers in Kerala are small compared to the huge rivers in other states. Of the 44 rivers in Kerala, three are flowing to the east and the rest flow to west to join the Arabian Sea. The three east flowing rivers are the tributaries of Kaveri. They are Kabani, Bhavani and Pambar. Kabani flows to Karnataka and join Kaveri whereas the other two flow to Tamil Nadu. The biggest river is Bharathapuzha which is also known as “Peraar” in ancient texts and the second is Periyar.

The importance of rivers in the culture of Kerala can be seen from the festivals conducted on the banks of the rivers. The famous festival ‘Mamankam’ is conducted in Thirunavai, on the banks of Bharathapuzha. Venue of Aluva Sivarathri festival and the birthplace of Sree Sankaracharya are on the bank of river Periyar. The famous Sabarimala Sree Dharma Shastha temple is situated near the Pamba river. The Maramon convention which is one of the largest Christian conventions in Asia is also held here. The flood in 1341 CE in the Periyar put an end to the supremacy of Kodungallur area and led to the rise of the new port town in Kochi. It is the flood in the same river that terminated Tipu Sultan’s invasion to the southern regions in 1789. In the present day there are eighty-one dams built on different rivers in Kerala which helps in the irrigation and generation of hydroelectric power.

### 2.4.2 Backwaters

One of the tourist attractions of Kerala is the tranquil backwaters which serve as the connection between rivers and sea. They are very broad and are ideal for transportation. *Azhis* are the locations in the waterscape between the backwaters and the sea. There are water highways that connect northern and southern parts of Kerala. The biggest of the lakes is the Vembanad Lake lying between Alappuzha and Kochi and the name derived from the kingdom of Vempolinad. Sasthamkotta Lake is the largest freshwater lake and it is situated in the Kollam district.

### 2.4.3 Trade, Transport and Cultural Links

During this time, long-distance traders like Arabs, Jews, Persians, and Chinese arrived on Kerala's coasts primarily in pursuit of spices. This has a lengthy history that dates back to the first and second centuries CE, during the time of the classical Roman Empire, when traders from the Eastern Mediterranean arrived to the coastal ports of Naura, Tondi, Muciri, and Nelcynda, Kerala, to exchange spices. As the Roman Empire declined, trade with the Romans also decreased. Nonetheless, it appears that Jews and Arabs kept in touch at least until the fourth century CE. After a three-year break, the exchange contacts between the Arabs, Jews, and Persians appear to have resumed, as evidenced by recent excavations at Pattanam (also known as Muciri). They appear to have been joined by Chinese traders.



Since the thirteenth century, horses have played a significant role in trade, although primarily as transit goods. In Kerala's lowlands, where trade routes primarily went via villages with marshlands, it was of no use. Throughout midland Kerala, there were simply pedestrian pathways that connected ferries. Even bullock carts were not very useful because they were not meant for the tracks that went through the muddy plains and the sloping uplands.

Ma Huan documented the custom of using pack horses to transport larger loads and head-loads of pepper and other items over shorter distances. The transportation of goods by pack animals via the Shenkottai Pass between Tamilnadu and Kerala is mentioned in *Unnunilisandesam*. Coastal areas were also common places for the trafficking of goods by sea. The Panthalayani Kollam and Kozhikode settlement registers provide specific plot names in the Samoothiri royal territory that allude to the presence of an *otayis* who produced seafaring vessels. Early in the sixteenth century CE, the Italian

adventurer Ludovico de Vathema praised the skills of the *otayis* in planking the leak-proof hull without the need of nails.

### Cultural Links

The presence of Jewish and St. Thomas Christian community in Kerala can be attributed to its close ties to Arabia, Egypt, and the Western world. Tradition claims that in 51 CE, St. Thomas the Apostle arrived in Kerala and converted several local families to Christianity. A small-scale Levant emigrant community is linked to Thomas of Cana, a Syrian merchant who visited Malabar later in the 5th century. A small Jewish group also found their way to the Malabar Coast during the early Christian era and settled there.

In Kerala, Buddhism and Jainism became rather popular and appeared to be on the rise until the sixth century CE. The Srimula Sthana Vihara was well-known throughout the world and appears to have been an outstanding hub for Buddhist education. In Kerala, these religions had

faded by the sixth century. Kerala had a significant rebirth of Hinduism in the eighth century, and Sankara's enduring legacy continues to shine through Indian history.

Kerala has been in contact with the Arabian coast since ancient times, and traders used to frequently visit the Malabar ports, particularly those from Muscat and other Arabian Peninsula areas. Kerala

also felt the immediate effect of Islam's invasion of Arabia. A Muslim inscription found in Panthalayini Kollam in North Malabar dated Hejira 166 makes it evident that Islam expanded throughout Malabar at an early date through both conversion and the establishment of Arab traders. Under the Khalifs, as Arab trade expanded, Malabar ports flourished with the traders of Muslim capitals.

## Recap

- ◆ Kerala has 44 rivers, mostly flowing westward
- ◆ Kabani, Bhavani, Pambar rivers flow eastward from Kerala
- ◆ Bharathapuzha and Periyar are Kerala's largest rivers
- ◆ Major festivals are celebrated on riverbanks across Kerala
- ◆ Mamankam festival held on Bharathapuzha's river banks
- ◆ Vembanad Lake is Kerala's largest backwater system
- ◆ Sasthamkotta is Kerala's biggest freshwater lake
- ◆ Periyar flood reshaped trade; Kochi port emerged
- ◆ Ancient trade connected Kerala with Arabs and Romans
- ◆ Trade linked Kerala to Jews, Persians, Chinese
- ◆ Pattanam excavation revealed early world trade links
- ◆ Otayis built ships without nails, praised by travelers
- ◆ Early Kerala saw Buddhism, Jainism, then Hindu revival

## Objective Questions

1. Which is the biggest river in Kerala?
2. Where is the Mamankam festival conducted?
3. Which river is associated with Sabarimala Temple?
4. What connects Kerala's rivers and the sea?
5. Which is the largest freshwater lake in Kerala?
6. The Vembanad Lake is named after which kingdom?
7. Which classical empire had early trade links with Kerala?
8. Which pass was used to transport goods between Tamil Nadu and Kerala?
9. Which Italian traveler praised the skills of Kerala's otayis?
10. The Maramon Convention is held on the banks of which river?
11. Which ancient Kerala port is identified with recent excavations at Pattanam?
12. Which river is referred to as "Peraar" in ancient texts?

## Answers

1. Bharathapuzha
2. Bharathapuzha
3. Pampa
4. *Azhi*
5. Sasthamkotta
6. Vempolinad
7. Roman Empire

8. Shenkottai Pass
9. Ludovico de Varthema
10. Pamba
11. Muziris
12. Bharathapuzha

## Assignments

1. Describe the geographical features and cultural significance of major rivers in Kerala, highlighting their influence on festivals and settlements.
2. Evaluate the historical significance of the Vembanad and Sasthamkotta lakes in the social and economic development of Kerala.
3. Describe the historical importance of Kerala's backwaters and lakes in terms of trade and transportation.
4. Analyse the trade and cultural exchanges between Kerala and foreign civilizations such as the Arabs, Jews, Persians, Romans, and Chinese during the early centuries CE.
5. Evaluate the role of natural events, such as the flood of 1341 CE in the Periyar River, in altering Kerala's trade and political geography.

## Suggested Reading

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2. Gopalakrishnan, P.K., *Keralathinte Samskarika Charithram*, Kerala Bhasha Institute, 1994.
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## Stone Tools and Prehistoric Sites

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ understand the chronological framework and major characteristics of the Stone Age in Kerala
- ◆ identify major rock art sites in Kerala and analyse the significance of rock art in Kerala's prehistory
- examine the types and distribution of megalithic burial monuments in Kerala
- analyse the socio-economic aspects of megalithic culture, and the transition from pastoralism to agriculture

### Prerequisites

Kerala's ancient history, deeply rooted in the pre-modern era, reveals a complex tapestry of environmental adaptation, cultural expression, and technological evolution. The region's prehistoric period, marked by the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic ages, saw early human activity through the use of stone tools, with significant archaeological findings from sites like Edakkal, Thenmala, and Marayur. These sites not only yielded tools but also rock art, reflecting the spiritual and everyday life of early inhabitants. As the Iron Age emerged, Kerala became notable for its megalithic culture, with distinctive burial monuments like *Kudakkallu* (umbrella stones), dolmens, and cist burials that indicate a belief in life after death and evolving social structures. The presence of grave goods, pottery types, and the development of metallurgy suggest transitions from foraging to agriculture and semi-nomadic life. Despite its challenging geography of dense forests and heavy rainfall, Kerala maintained vibrant trade and cultural links with Arabs, Jews, Persians, and Chinese traders, especially during the early

historical period. This blend of indigenous development and external influence profoundly shaped Kerala's cultural landscape.

## Keywords

Stone Age, Iron Age, Rock Art, Petroglyphs, Megalithic Sites, Edakkal Cave, Burial Monuments

## Discussion

### 2.5.1 Stone Age Sites and Tools

Prehistory includes the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic period commonly called the Stone Age in which stone tools were used by the humans. The Palaeolithic period is further divided into Early Palaeolithic, Middle Palaeolithic and Upper Palaeolithic and this period dates to approximately 30000 BCE for Kerala.

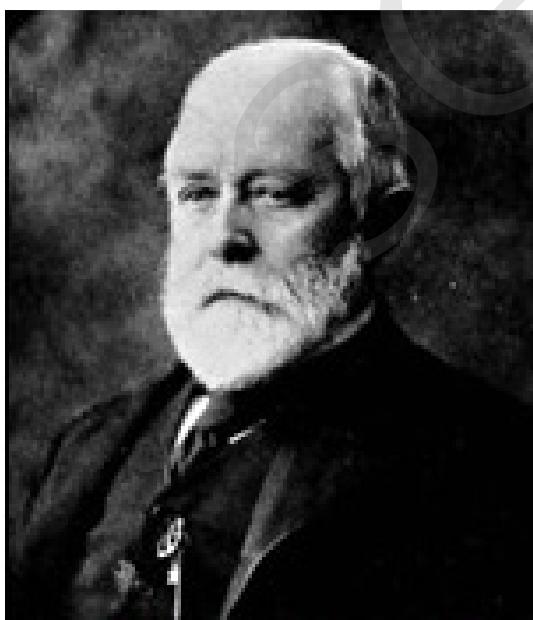


Fig 2.5.1 R.B.Foot (1834-1912)

Robert Bruce Foot, known as the father of Indian Prehistory because of his extensive works in the field, could bring out the first hoard of Palaeolithic stone tools in Pallavaram in Tamil Nadu in 1863. In spite of his extensive surveys in southern India, he was skeptical about any Palaeolithic evidence in Kerala, since he presumed that Kerala has an unsuitable environment for human habitation because of the dense forest, heavy rainfall and marshy lands.

Even though Mesolithic and Neolithic tools were identified in Kerala later, it took more than a century for the region to find a place in the map of Palaeolithic sites in India. In 1974, Dr. P.Rajendran found Chopper tool made of quartz pebbles from Kanjirapuzha in Palakkad district. Many other subsequent researchers have identified sites with Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic implements from the districts of Malappuram, Kasargod, Kottayam, Kollam, Kannur, Wayand, and Thiruvananthapuram. Dating of these tools is not yet done scientifically except the Mesolithic site in Thenmala in Kollam.



Fig 2.5.2 Hand Axe

In 1930-35, Col. Todd exposed hoards of microliths from Chevayur in Kozhikode and it was the first discovery of the Stone age in Kerala. Later in 1973, Pathmanaban Thampi discovered Marayur rock shelters and microliths. The Mesolithic period was characterised by small sized tools known as microliths. In Kerala, they were made of crystalline quartz and rarely chert was also found. Along with the finished tools quartz nodules were also identified, so the tools must have been manufactured in the same area. The tool types consist of blades, burin, borers, scrapers, points etc.; They could have been used by hafting wooden sticks. The Carbon dating of the Mesolithic deposit of Thenmala shelter gives a date of c. 5200.

When it comes to the Neolithic age, Kerala has not yielded many sites except in Wayanad. It seems that the Neolithic period was brief before the Iron Age. Tools of this period are mainly well shaped and polished axes known as Celt. Philip Lake discovered the first celt in Kerala and later Fred Fawcett identified flakes, celts and a couple of beads in 1894 from Kuppamudi near Edakkal. During his further exploration, he spotted the Edakkal caves and brought it to light for further study. It is presumed that by the time Edakkal caves became a habitation zone, people had shifted from food gathering to food producing stage. They started agriculture,

domestication of animals, pottery making, creating dwelling places etc.,. But for Kerala, proper evidence for the above-mentioned traits are scanty as it lacks habitation sites. Dr. P. Rajendran's works also identify the survival of Prehistoric cultural traits in tribes residing in the densely forested zones of Western Ghats.



Fig 2.5.3 Neolithic Celt

## 2.5.2 Rock Art Sites

Humans started to draw long before the invention of paper and other materials. They used the walls of their cave shelters and it is fascinating to see their life through these paintings.

Rock art is the paintings or carvings on the walls or ceilings of natural rock shelters, caves or boulders executed by humans. It is also known as rock paintings, rock engravings, rock carvings on paleo art. The use of these arts is a matter of debate as this may have been used in connection with rituals or art. But it is a vital source shedding light on a variety of themes such as magic, hunting, flora and fauna of which form part and parcel of the prehistoric people. Mainly, there are two types of rock art.

### 2.5.2.1 Petrographs/Paintings

They are monochrome or polychrome paintings on the rock surface with the

use of a variety of minerals and natural compounds. Predominantly used colours are red, black and white. They were attained through red ochre, charcoal and lime or chalk respectively. They were powdered and mixed with water and a binding medium and applied to the surface using soft fibers, hair or fingers as brush. In the presence of water and other solvents, these minerals get oxidized and leave the colour on the surface. In India, Bhimbetka is the best example for this type of rock art. In Kerala, it exists in Marayur in Idukki.

### 2.5.2.2 Petroglyphs

This type of rock art is created by carving, engraving or scratching methods. Edakkal and Tovari in Wayanad, Tenmala in Kollam, and Ankode in Thiruvananthapuram are the sites with Petroglyphs rock art in Kerala.

In the beginning the epicentre of rock art in Kerala was Wayanad. Later, more and more sites were found in the southern region. The first discovery on rock art was by Fred Fawcett on Edakkal caves in 1894. Though it was published in 1901, detailed studies were not carried out for a long time. It was only in 1991, that Yasodhar Mathpal did a systematic survey, recording and analysis of this site. The main rock art sites in Kerala are Edakkal, Tovari, Tenmala, Ankode and Marayur.



### Edakkal Rock Engravings

The cave is located in the western slope of Edakkal Hill in Wayanad district. Even though the site is mentioned as a cave, it is rather a cleft or shelter by splitting away from a main rock and another rock on top acting as a roof. The petroglyphs in this cave are carved deeply in the granite surface and have human figures, animal, geometric and non-geometric symbols. The important one among them is a life size human figure with raised arms and the head covered with a headdress. The torso is depicted with deep vertical strokes in an hourglass shape, while the head and legs in triangular shape and there are a number of linear lines around this motif. The Neolithic Celt found from here and the surrounding area dates the site to that period.



### Engravings at Tovari

Tovari is situated in Wayanad and consists of four huge boulders with rocks inclined on them. The engravings are on the left and ceiling of the inclined rock. The drawings are mainly of geometrical shapes like triangles, squares, circles and combinations of these. Some stylised figures are also depicted here. Even though the style of carving is the same as Edakkal, the thickness and depth of the line are less. They are probably drawn with smaller implements.

### Engravings at Thenmala

This is in the Chenthuruni hills in Kollam district and it is the only site where Carbon dating has been conducted as this rock shelter yielded Mesolithic implements along with wood charcoal. This deposit has been dated to c.5200 BP. The incision here forms a cross-hatching pattern resembling the Edakkal engravings.



### Engravings at Ankode

This rock shelter is situated in Thiruvananthapuram district and the engravings include flower motifs, human figures, geometrical patterns and sun symbols. This area produced a collection of Mesolithic implements..

### Painted Rock Shelters of Marayur

This is the only site in Kerala where both petrograph and petroglyph type of art is available. These rock shelters are located in the Anjanad valley, in Marayur town in Idukki district. This site was discovered by Pathmanaban Thampi in 1973. After this many other sites were identified in the nearby areas which are part of Anjanad valley. Red ochre, white kaolin and ashes were used as pigments for the drawing. Surface of the rocks are covered with paintings and engravings of animals. Five phases of super impositions can be seen here. It includes cattle, deer, bulls, goats and human figures overlapping those paintings. The human figures are huge and the biggest one is more than three metres in height. One of the rock shelters has about 400 rock paintings, which is the largest in this site. These petrograhs are in white and an interesting depiction is of a boat. Scholars have different views about the date of these paintings and from all the opinions it can be assumed that this rock art can be dated to Stone Age and megalithic period.

Kerala rock art is not similar to the rock arts in Karnataka and Andhra. But, according to Erwin Neumayer paintings from Ezhuthumala in Marayur are similar to the paintings by Veda people of Sri Lanka. In Kerala, rock art sites are found all over in limited numbers.

### 2.5.3 Iron Age Relics

Egyptian pyramids are mesmerising structures on the planet and millions of tourists visit them every day. They were erected to commemorate the dead and are there any such types of monuments in India? There are monuments erected here to commemorate the dead, but they are not as huge as the pyramids. They are known as Megaliths.

The Neolithic period was succeeded by the Iron Age which is also known as the Megalithic age. The term 'Megalith' means huge stones and this period is characterised by the use of iron and erection of huge stones as burial monuments. However, many of the burial types are not made of large stones as the expression Megalith indicates. Though megaliths were used for huge funerary monuments, the expression came to be used generally for the smaller monuments also. These Megalithic monuments have been found in different time brackets in the Indo-Gangetic basin, in Rajasthan, North of Gujarat, Nagpur region of Maharashtra, Southern

peninsula and this tradition still survives among the tribes of north eastern states of India. Similar megalithic structures were also seen in other parts of Asia, Africa and Europe. Even though these are found in most parts of India, there are regional variations in the types of Megaliths.

The first Megalithic discovery in Kerala was made by Babington in 1823 from Bangalamotta parambu in Chirakkal Taluk of Kannur district. Later, British administrators and other scholars undertook extensive studies on Megaliths and found a number of sites throughout the state. After the excavations at Porkalam, Thrissur, and many other sites were excavated and this enriched our understanding of Megaliths of Kerala. Different sites have variations in their dates. But on the whole, Megaliths in Kerala can be dated between 1000 BCE and 300CE.

The Megalithic monuments are known by different names as they appear to us. They are Umbrella stone or *Kudakkallu* and Hat stone or *Thoppikallu*. Other types found are Laterite dome, Laterite Chamber, Dolmens, Cist burial, Urn burial, Menhir, Hero Stones and Stone alignment. The last three are erected as commemorative. Even within the state the distribution of the megaliths is based on the availability of material.

### 2.5.3.1 Umbrella Stone/*Kudakkal*

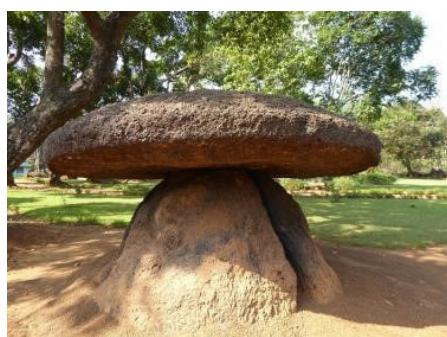


Fig 2.5.4 Kudakkal

This mushroom shaped structure is made of laterite stone and it resembles the shape of an umbrella. This type is fashioned as domical shaped dressed laterite stone skillfully made to rest on four orthostats. Top of the capstone is convex, while the bottom is slightly concave and the size ranges from two to three meters. This type is seen in the districts of Thrissur, Palakkad, Kozhikode, Kannur and Malappuram. Some of the excavations underneath the monuments revealed big jar burials.

### 2.5.3.2 Hat Stone/*Thoppikal*

These types of megaliths are hemispherical shaped laterite stones resting directly on the earth and act as a cap or external marker for urn burials. In some cases, they are found surrounded by vertically planted stones or as three or four stones arranged in a circle.

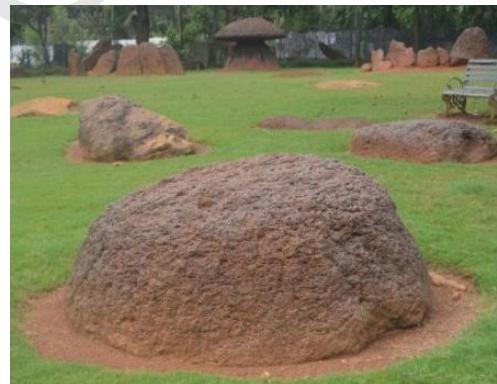


Fig 2.5.5 Thoppikal

This is also seen in the northern part of Kerala mainly in Palakkad and Thrissur. In Cherumangad, hat stones can be seen along with umbrella stones.

### 2.5.3.3 Laterite Dome

Mostly found in North Kerala, this is made below the earth by scoop out the laterite in a hemispherical shape with a



Fig 2.5.6 Laterite Dome

rectangular entrance. Some of them have *in-situ* pillars at the centre. The domes have height varying from three to five meters and in certain cases one or two (laterite) benches were also cut inside. Laterite slab is used to close the entrance and it also has a passage from the surface that leads into the dome. Grave goods were found on the floor and on the benches inside the dome.

#### 2.5.3.4 Laterite Chamber

This burial monument is made by cutting rectangular chambers within the laterite stone below the surface. Some of them have more than one chamber and there may be holes, which are known as port holes connecting the chambers. After placing the grave goods, the chamber is closed with a large rock slab.



Fig 2.5.7 Laterite Chamber

#### 2.5.3.5 Dolmens

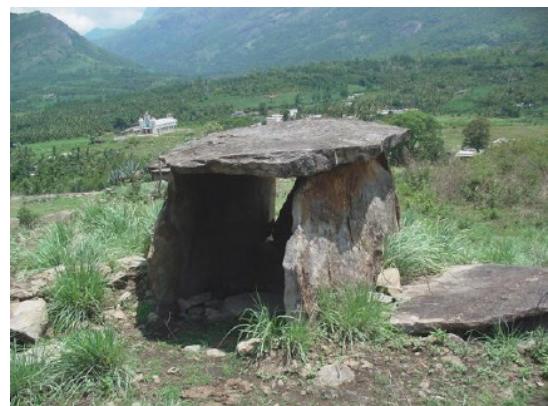


Fig 2.5.8 Dolmens

They are found in the Anjanad valley and on the Cardamom Hills in Idukki district. They are larger in size and constructed by placing four stone slabs vertically on the ground and the fifth stone placed on top as a cap. One of the vertical slabs has a porthole in the east-west or north-west direction. Grave goods are placed within the dolmens on the floor.

#### 2.5.3.6 Cist Burial

Mostly found in the southern districts of the state, these are constructed with dressed rock slabs below the earth. After digging a rectangular pit one slab is placed horizontally at base. Then four slabs were placed vertically as walls. In some cases, one of the vertical slabs has a port-hole and this will be closed with another rock. This can be single or double chambered. Grave goods were placed inside and then soil is filled on the top and another stone slab will be placed to close the cist. In one of the excavations at Arippa in Kollam, a baby skull, human and animal bones were collected along with hundreds of grave goods.



Fig 2.5.9 Cist Burial

### 2.5.3.7 Urn Burial

These burials are mostly found in the coastal region and some of them are also found in the midland and highland area. They are the simplest forms of burials with urns buried in the earth; they do not have any surface indications. So, they are discovered accidentally in most cases. Generally, the sizes of the urns are medium. But in some cases, there are bigger jars, three to five feet tall and they are known as *Nannangadikal*. Grave goods and skeletal remains were deposited in them and closed with lids.

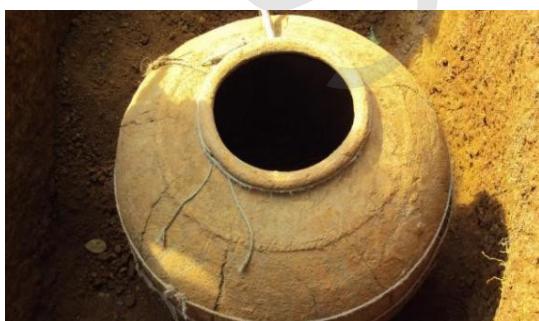


Fig 2.5.10 Urn Burial

### 2.5.3.8 Menhir

Menhirs are monolithic burial monuments rectangular in shape with a reclining top and the height varies from

two to seventeen feet. Locally available stones are used to make it. Big jars are found beneath these in many cases. Some of them are erected as commemorative monuments.



Fig 2.5.11 Menhir

### 2.5.3.9 Hero Stone



Fig 2.5.12 Hero Stone

Hero stones may be a later introduction to the Megalithic culture as figures are depicted on them. These monuments are usually found in Tamil Nadu and in Kerala, they are found in Wayanad. As the name suggests, they are placed to commemorate the heroes who died in battles. There are hero stones for women which are known as *Puratrchikallu*. On some of the hero

stones there are depictions of battle scenes and the descending of heroes to heaven.

### 2.5.3.10 Stone Alignment

In Kerala only one site was discovered with stone alignment so far. It is at Abhayagiri near Kulathupuzha in Kollam. This type is very rare in India and only a few such sites were reported from other parts of India. Rock slabs were placed vertically on the surface and gaps were maintained in between them at certain intervals. The Abhayagiri cist burial is adjacent to it. Tribes from Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Orissa and Jharkhand are still following the tradition of erection of Megalithic monuments.



Fig 2.5.13 Stone Alignment

Bondas and Bedabas of Orissa still follow the custom of erecting dolmens.

### 2.5.4 Megalithic Culture

One of the major drawbacks of megalithic sites in Kerala is the absence of information from habitation sites. In the case of neighbouring states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, megalithic habitation sites were identified and some of them are along with burial grounds. The only discovery closely associated

with habitation sites is the finding of iron ingots from Abhayagiri and Umayanaloor in Kollam. Hundreds of ingots were discovered from Umayanalloor in 2015. Without any habitation sites so far, analysis of the grave goods is the only source to know about the life of megalithic people.

For burying the dead, different customs prevailed in the society. Tamil epic *Manimekhala* mentions five modes of burial customs, cremation, exposition of the body to decay, burial in graves, entombing the dead in strong low vaults and interning the body in urns and covering them. In South India, fractional burial or secondary burial was widely followed. Accordingly, the dead body was either cremated or exposed to the elements to decay and later the bones were collected and buried in some other place.



Fig 2.5.14 Grave goods in a burial, Kodumanal TN

These collected bones were placed in urns or pots or cists along with iron weapons, beads, ornaments and potteries of various sizes and sometimes these were marked with huge stones on the surface. Antiquities found along with the skeletal remains are commonly referred to as grave goods.



Fig 2.5.15 BRW, RW, BSW, potteries,  
Porunthal TN

Megalithic people could have practiced agriculture as iron agricultural tools were found in the graves. However, opinions of scholars vary as some argue that this community was pastoral and semi-nomadic, while some others argue that this period shows a transition from pastoralism

to agriculture. The size of the Megalithic burials and the quality of grave goods could indicate the social differences of contemporary society. Different varieties of potteries like Black and Red Ware (BRW), Red Ware (RW), Black Slipped Ware (BSW), etc. were obtained from the burials and the types give some ideas about their use. The quality of potteries shows the lifestyle and richness as well decorated high-quality potteries may have been used by the upper class. Keeping grave goods for the deceased person shows a belief in life after death. There is evidence of offerings near the port hole in some of the Megaliths and this gives an idea that the people may have given annual offerings to the dead.

## Recap

- ◆ Kerala's Stone Age includes three major phases
- ◆ Robert Bruce Foot found first Indian tools
- ◆ Dr. Rajendran confirmed Kerala's prehistoric evidence
- ◆ Chevayur yielded Kerala's first microliths discovery
- ◆ Mesolithic tools made from quartz, and chert
- ◆ Neolithic celts found near Edakkal caves
- ◆ Edakkal cave carvings depict stylised human figure
- ◆ Tovari engravings show geometric rock designs
- ◆ Thenmala carvings dated to 5200 BP
- ◆ Marayur rock shelters have both art forms
- ◆ Umbrella stones were domical laterite monuments
- ◆ Hat stones marked urn burial sites

- ◆ Hero stones honour warriors in battle
- ◆ Grave goods suggest belief in afterlife
- ◆ Megaliths indicate social differences and customs

## Objective Questions

1. Who is known as the “Father of Indian Prehistory”?
2. Which tool is associated with the Mesolithic period?
3. Who discovered the first Palaeolithic tools in Kerala?
4. Name the only Mesolithic site in Kerala with carbon dating.
5. What is the name of the mushroom-shaped megalith?
6. Name the petroglyph site discovered by Fred Fawcett.
7. What is a characteristic pottery of Megalithic culture?
8. Which site in Kerala features stone alignment?
9. Where were the first Palaeolithic tools discovered in Kerala?
10. What is the only scientifically dated Mesolithic site in Kerala?
11. Which site in Kerala contains both paintings and carvings?
12. What indicates social differentiation among Megalithic people?

## Answers

1. R.B. Foot
2. Microlith
3. Dr. P. Rajendran

4. Thenmala
5. *Kudakkal*
6. Edakkal
7. Black and Red Ware
8. Abhayagiri
9. Kanjirapuzha
10. Thenmala
11. Marayur
12. Quality of grave goods

## Assignments

1. Define the term 'Megalith' and explain the variety of megalithic burial types found in Kerala.
2. Identify and explain the different types of Megalithic burial monuments found in Kerala. What do these artistic expressions reveal about the beliefs and lifestyle of prehistoric people?
3. Compare and contrast the petroglyphs of Edakkal and Tovari.
4. Discuss the significance of the Edakkal cave engravings in the study of Kerala's prehistory.
5. Examine the role of Dr. P. Rajendran in the discovery and documentation of Palaeolithic evidence in Kerala. How did his findings challenge earlier assumptions about prehistoric human settlement in the region?

## Suggested Reading

1. Gurukkal, Rajan & Raghava Varier., *History of Kerala: Prehistoric to the Present*, Orient Thiruvananthapuram, 1999.
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## Kerala as a Part of Tamilakam





## Source Materials

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ familiarise with the expressions and complexities underlying the origin, historicity and chronology of ‘the period of Sangam’
- ◆ introduce to the sources that furnish information on the period of Sangam
- ◆ made aware of how the corpus of Sangam poetry has been used in the study of polity, economy and culture of Tamilakam
- ◆ narrate how the classical geographies offer insights into the study of the ‘period of Sangam’
- ◆ explain how archaeological findings have been employed to corroborate the information from contemporary literary materials

### Prerequisites

The Sangam Age marks a seminal chapter in the early historical consciousness of South India, often hailed as the ‘first well-illuminated epoch’ in the region’s history. This era, traditionally believed to span several centuries, is primarily known through the corpus of Sangam literature—an extensive body of poetic compositions attributed to a multitude of poets. These texts provide valuable insights into the political structures, social hierarchies, economic patterns, religious beliefs, and cultural practices of early Tamilakam. Despite their literary brilliance and historical relevance, several contentious debates persist regarding the origin of the Sangam assemblies, the precise chronology of the

texts, and even the etymology and institutional character of the term ‘Sangam’. While Sangam literature remains the cornerstone for reconstructing the period, its interpretation is significantly enriched by corroborative evidence from classical Greco-Roman accounts, indigenous literary sources, inscriptions, and archaeological findings. A nuanced understanding of these diverse sources is essential to grasp the complexities of South Indian society during the Sangam period.

## Keywords

*Sangam Poetry, Ettuthogai, Pattupattu, Tolkappiyam, Classical Geographies, Archaeological Materials*

## Discussion

### 3.1.1 Sangam Literature and Roman Accounts

The historic period in Kerala history commences with what was generally called the ‘Sangam age’. What do we mean by the *Sangam* age? What significance does it hold in the history of Kerala?

The expression ‘Sangam’ means collection or group. It was either a collection of poets or a collection of poems. Opinions vary regarding the origin of the word. While some scholars consider the word as derived from the Tamil word *Changam*, meaning *thugai* or collection, another school argues that the word is of Sanskrit origin which also denotes collection or group. A few others attribute Buddhist orientation to the word and argue that the word *Sangam* originated from the word *Sangha*, indicating Buddhist monastery.

The term *Sangam* cannot be found anywhere in the poems of the earlier phases. However, the words *Avaiyam*, *Punar Kuttu* etc. appear in these works which were used to denote a ‘body of scholars who

had the right to censor literary works’. It was later in the work *Iraiyanar Agapporul* of Nakkirar that the word *Sangam* was used. The work mentions three *Sangams* which lasted for about 9990 years. In fact, it was an assembly or group or academy of poets or scholars.

In the legendary accounts given in *Iraiyanar Agapporul*, it has been mentioned that there existed three *Sangams*. The first *Sangam* was believed to have been held at Thenmadurai and was chaired by Saint Agastya in the presence of gods-Shiva, Kubera and Muruga. The second *Sangam* was believed to have been organised at Kapatapuram, which was chaired by Saint Agastya as well. The third *Sangam* held at Madurai was chaired by Nakkirar. The story goes that the first two *Sangams* were washed away by tsunamis. Historians are of the opinion that *Ettuthogai*, *Pathupattu* and other works were compiled during the last *Sangam*. Therefore, the general consensus among scholars is that the third *Sangam* is historical.

In addition, there are some anonymous poems. Each of the poems is followed

Which Sangam?	Who was its President?	Where was it staged?
First	Agastya	Thenmadurai
Second	Agastya	Kapatapuram
Third	Nakkirar	Madurai

by notes indicating the name of the poet and the occasion of its composition. Undoubtedly the compilation and editing of these works should be seen as the work of an assembly or group or academy of poets or scholars.

Tamilakam denotes a wide geographical region inhabited by the ancient Tamil people and covered almost the whole of today's Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry and places in the immediate proximity of



of years. This forces the historians to ascertain that the '*Sangam age*' was an age of several generations spread out over several centuries and was not of a 'concise period of time.' Therefore, we cannot assign any specific time span for the *Sangam* age.

Certain historians like Rajan Gurukkal have argued that the phrase *Sangam* age itself is misleading and that the term is a misnomer. The period of *Sangams* is not to be understood as representing one age, rather, the literary works represented several phases or ages. It covered several

centuries reflecting several levels of material cultural contexts. As such it cannot be regarded as a 'specific period of time'.

*Ettuthogai* and *Pathupattu* represented the first phase of the age of *Sangam*. *Tolkappiyam* marked the next phase by bringing conventions, syntax and grammar pertaining to speech and writing, which brought a tremendous change in the way literature was conceived. *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekhala* are epics that represent a later phase of the 'Age of Sangams'.

It has already been stated that the period in which *Sangam* literature was composed and compiled is still a matter of raging controversy. Historians, scholars and linguists still rigorously debate on the age of the *Sangams*. V.A. Smith and Krishnaswamy Ayyangar place *Sangam* literature in the first three centuries. Nilakanta Sastri ascribes the first three or four centuries to the *Sangam* age, while Ramachandra Dikshitar and K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar places the period between 500 BCE to 500 CE. N. Subramanian argues that the period of *Sangams* belonged to the first three centuries of the Common Era. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai however places the period of the *Sangam* in the 5th or 6th century CE. The historians tend to arrive at a broad consensus of the period between 500 BCE to 500 CE in which the literary works were compiled by *Sangams*.

During the early stages of the composition, poets wandered around Tamilakam, singing songs. These wandering poets or bards recited amateur compositions which were full of praise for their chieftains and these poems give vivid descriptions of the places they lived in. These were short poems of three lines to a maximum of forty lines. These poems were composed, maybe several centuries before the three *Sangams* were convened. Still later, these poems were compiled and classified based on theme, content and even based on the number of lines. Around 2371 poems were arranged accordingly into eight collections, known as *Ettuthogai* (*Ettu* -means eight and *togai* means a collection). The eight collections were *Aingurunooru*, *Narrinai*, *Agananuru*, *Purananuru*, *Kuruntogai*, *Kalithogai*, *Parippadal* and *Pattupattu*. *Agananuru*, which literally means 'Four Hundred Love poems' which deals with the theme of love. *Purananuru* was quite different from *Agananuru*. It comprised four hundred poems that dealt with war and death.

Later, poets started writing longer poems that were around 100 to 800 lines. These poems comprised magnificent descriptions of the lands of Tamilakam that a traveler would witness on his journey. These poems were musically rendered, which invited wide attention. These poems were compiled into '*Pathupattu*', which was called Ten Idylls in English. They were *Thirumurugaruppadai*, *Mullaipattu*, '*Maduraikkanchi*', '*Kurinjippattu*', '*Pattinappalai*' etc. It was in '*Maduraikkanchi*', we find references to the celebration of *Onam* in Tamilakam. The '*Ettuthogai*' and '*Pathupattu*' were collectively termed as '*Pathinenmelkanakku*'.

Soon, with the emergence

of '*Tolkappiyam*', which was a comprehensive work on poetics, certain ground rules were laid down regarding certain conventions, forms of grammar, usages of certain expressions etc. We find parallels to these rules in spheres of public life. '*Tolkappiyam*' categorised the use of Tamil language into *Kodumtamil* to be used for literary works and *sentamil* which was used for speech. This brought in a form of social regulation. The work is considered as the 'grandfather of Tamil literature' which even listed rules on how to pronounce words.

Society got transformed easily with social regulation and this ushered in chiefdoms. With the exchange of goods with Roman merchants, the economy expanded. *Tamilakam* entered into a more complex phase politically, economically, socially and culturally. This phase was marked by the rise of heterodox religions- Buddhism and Jainism. This phase also finds the *Sangam* literature climbing to the zenith of its glory. *Pathinenkizhkanakku*, *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekhalai* were composed during this period. *Pathinenkizhkanakku*, which was also known as 'Eighteen Lesser Texts' talks about the ethical values and morals one should imbibe in his life. '*Tirukural*', was written by Thiruvalluvar, was a part of these texts.

'*Silappadikaram*', the captivating story of Kovalan and Kannagi is one of the greatest epics in Tamil literature. With a powerful narrative, the author *Ilango Adikal* in '*Silappadikaram*' manages to portray three bustling cities of his period -*Uraiyyur*, *Madurai* and *Muziris*. *Manimekhalai*, the sequel to *Silappadikaram* written by Sattanar was the story of *Manimekhalai*, born to Kovalan and his ladylove Madhavi who later converted to Buddhism. The epic

represented the popularity of heterodox religions like Buddhism in Tamilakam.

Many classical accounts written by Greek and Roman scholars have provided insights into ‘age of Sangams.’ The author of ‘*Periplus of Erythraen Sea*’ had given details on the ports of *Muziris*, *Tyndis*, *Barace or Bacare* and *Nelcynda* lying on the Kerala coast. The author describes in detail on the nature of the port and the people around, and the commodities could be procured. In the case of certain ports, the author also gives details of the respective chieftains. The book also has references to the volume of Indo-Roman exchange.

Pliny who authored ‘*Naturalis Historia*’ refers to *Muziris* as an emporium and agrees with the former’s observation on overseas exchange of goods. It was around a hundred years after when Ptolemy in his work *Geography* identifies *Muziris* up north the river *Periyar* and it reflects how India was visualised by Greeks and Romans. The ‘*Tabula Peutingeriana*’, a couple of maps taken out of some Roman paintings, also served as reliable evidence of the *Sangam* age.

The Sanskrit work ‘*Aitareya Aryanaka*’ has made references to ‘*Cherapadah*’, while the great epic *Mahabharata* talks of a Chera king who helped in providing military assistance during the Kurukshetra war. Kautilya’s ‘*Arthashastra*’ had referred to the Churni river from which they found pearls which might offer details on *Neythal tinai* and how they manufactured pearls.

### 3.1.2 Tamil-Brahmi Inscriptions and Roman Coins

In the third century CE, the *Brahmi* script was used to write Tamil, which was later known as Tamil-Brahmi. This script was also known as *Damili* or *Tamili*. We

find Tamil- *Brahmi* inscriptions, which range over 30 in number, most of them in caves. Since these inscriptions are found mostly in the form of labels inside caves, they are also called Cave label inscriptions. They are found at Edakkal, Kodumanal, Mangulam, Jambai etc.

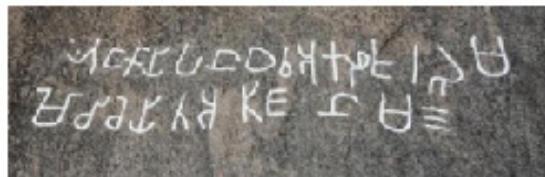


Fig 3.1.1 Tamil Brahmi inscriptions

Remains of Tamil- *Brahmi* inscriptions are found on potsherds, coins, rings, seals, etc. The Mangulam inscription furnishes valuable information on Nedumchezhiyan who ruled over the Pandyas during the *Sangam* age. The *Jambai* inscription talks about a cave grant by *Atiyan*, who was the Velir chief of Takadur. The Pugalur inscriptions mention a Chera king who ruled from Karur. It also mentions the occupations of people- *Ponvanikan*, *Aruvaivanikan*, *Kozhuvavanikan*, *Uppuvanikan*, *Panithavanikan* etc.

The Edicts of Asoka were also instrumental in fixing the chronology of Chera, Chola, Pandya chieftains of the ‘period of *Sangam*’. The inscriptive references suggest that several Chera, Chola, Pandya lineages were ruling over South India simultaneously.

A large number of gold and silver Roman coins were found in hoards which were issued by Roman emperors, Augustus, Tiberius and Nero. Roman coins had been excavated from Punjar, Niranam, Eyyal, Palai, Valluvalli etc. Rajan Gurukkal points out the fact that coins were not used as units of currency, but as commodities that were traded.



Fig 3.1.2 Roman coins were unearthed from Hoards in Tamilakam

### 3.1.3 Burial Practices and Excavation Reports

The burials were helpful for historians and archaeologists to uncover further details of the period of *Sangam*.

The people engaged in erecting a wide variety of funerary structures in memory of their ancestors. *Virakals* or hero-stones were erected to commemorate the heroic exploits of the fallen warriors. Archaeologists were fortunate to find dolmens, dolmenoid cists, urns, cairn circles, *sarchophagi* etc., and from these sites were unearthed remains - ornaments,

silver, iron, copper utensils, cloth and even coins. The details of these mortuary rituals and burial practices are dealt with separately. Though these are basically objects relating to the disposal of the dead, they provide information on material culture.

Excavation reports provided insights on the role played by several ports of Kerala during the age of *Sangams*. The excavation reports of Kerala Council of Historical Research and PAMA- Institute for Advancement of Transdisciplinary Archaeological Sciences from 2006 till 2020 have furnished vital information on Pattanam and Mathilakam, places in Tamilakam. Historians were able to infer details based on remains unearthed from the excavation sites-pottery, coins, beads, ornaments which are believed to have been used by people of Tamilakam.

#### Archaeological Remains

- Dolmens-burial chambers built above the ground with large stone slabs
- Cists-underground burial chambers
- Cairn-mound of soil heaped atop burials
- Menhir-boulder that indicates a burial
- Sarchophagi-long chamber of terracotta which consists human remains

## Recap

- ◆ Age of *Sangams*, the origin of word, historicity and its chronology
- ◆ Three *Sangams* - first *Sangam* held at Thenmadurai, second *Sangam* held at Kapatapuram and the Third *Sangam* held at Madurai.
- ◆ *Sangam* literature furnished details about polity and society of the *Sangam* period.
- ◆ Classical Accounts of the Greek and Roman scholars and Roman Coins provide details about the *Sangam* Age.
- ◆ Archaeological remains such as burials and *Virakals* also provide valuable information about Tamilakam.
- ◆ Excavation Reports by KCHR and PAMA give valuable information on Pattanam and Mathilakam.

## Objective Questions

1. Who presided over the first Sangam?
2. Where was the third Sangam held?
3. Which were the most important works of the Sangam period?
4. What was the 'Ettuthogai' and 'Pathupattu' collectively known as?
5. Which work was known as the oldest extant Tamil grammar?
6. Who was the author of 'Silappadikaram'?
7. Who were the important classical geographers who wrote on the ports of Kerala coast?
8. Who authored the work 'Naturalis Historia'?
9. What are the other names by which *Tamil-Brahmi* inscriptions are

known as?

10. Which were the methods used by the people of the period of *Sangams* to dispose of their dead?
11. Where were Roman coins found?
12. Which organisation's excavation reports gave information on Mathilakam and Pattanam?

## Answers

1. Agastya
2. Madurai
3. *Ettuthogai, Pathittupattu, Pathinenkizhkanakku, Pathinenmelkanakku, Silappadikaram, Manimekhalai* are some of the works of Sangam age.
4. *Pathinenkizhkanakku*
5. *Tolkkapiyam*
6. Ilango Adikal
7. Pliny, Ptolemy, Megasthenes, author of '*Periplus of Erythraen Sea*'
8. Pliny
9. Cave label Inscriptions
10. Fractional burials, Cremation in Rock cut chambers, etc.
11. Eyyal, Palai, Valluvalli, Punjar, Niranam
12. KCHR, PAMA

## Assignments

1. Evaluate the concept of the 'Sangam Age' with reference to its etymology, historical authenticity, and literary traditions

2. Discuss the geographical extent and cultural significance of Tamilakam during the Sangam period.
3. Examine the structure and themes of Sangam literary collections such as Ettuthogai and Pathupattu.
4. Analyse the role of archaeological and foreign classical sources such as the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea and the Naturalis Historia in reconstructing the history of Sangam age Kerala.
5. Assess the impact of Tolkappiyam and later Sangam epics such as Silappadikaram and Manimekhala in codifying linguistic and social norms

## Suggested Reading

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2. *Pattanam Excavation Reports* published by Kerala Council of Historical Research.
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## Tinai Concept

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ get a general awareness on the period of *Sangam* poetry
- ◆ be informed of the different types of *tinais* in *Sangam* literature
- ◆ find out the poetic imagery employed around the geographical space

### Prerequisites

A fundamental aspect of life and cultural expression in ancient Tamil society, as portrayed in Sangam literature, is the classification of the landscape into five distinct ecological regions known as *tinais*. Before exploring this unit, it is important to understand the foundational concepts surrounding the idea of *tinai* and its multifaceted significance.

The term *tinai* is derived from the Tamil root meaning “to join” or “to gather,” suggesting a natural association or community. In Sangam thought, this concept extended beyond mere geography—it represented a deep and dynamic relationship between the environment, human settlement, occupational practices, emotional states, and poetic expression. The geo-cultural landscape of ancient Tamilakam was classified into five principal *tinais*: *Kurinji* (mountains), *Mullai* (forests and pastoral lands), *Marutam* (agricultural or riverine tracts), *Neytal* (coastal regions), and *Palai* (arid or desert lands). Each of these ecological zones was characterized not only by its physical environment but also by its social, economic, and symbolic attributes.

For example, the people living in the *Kurinji* *tinai* engaged primarily in hunting

and gathering, while those in the Marutam tinai practiced settled agriculture. These divisions also influenced social customs, gods worshipped, types of relationships depicted in poetry, and even the emotional tone (akam and puram) of Sangam verse. Although the tinais were distinct, they were not rigidly separated—there were overlaps in lifestyle and interaction among them, indicating an interconnected and fluid society.

It is also crucial to understand that while many literary scholars have historically viewed the tinais as purely poetic or symbolic constructs, they were, in fact, grounded in real geophysical and socio-economic practices. The tinais reflect a pre-modern, eco-centric worldview in which nature and society were seen as deeply intertwined. These were not merely idealized poetic backdrops but functional cultural ecologies within which communities lived, worked, and expressed themselves.

Understanding the tinai system provides essential insight into the organization of ancient Tamil society, its economic foundations, its environmental awareness, and the aesthetic traditions that emerged from its intimate relationship with nature. This background is necessary for a comprehensive appreciation of the unit that follows, which delves deeper into the structure and cultural logic of the tinai classification system as depicted in Sangam writings

## Keywords

*Tinai, Tamilakam, Aintinai, Kurinji, Mullai, Palai, Marutham, Neythal*

## Discussion

### 3.2.1 Five Tinai

What was meant by the term *Aintinai*? The Tamil words, *Ain* denotes five and *Tinai* denoted the landscape. There were five *tinais* and together they are called the *Aintinai*. The five of them were *Kurinji*, *Mullai*, *Palai*, *Neythal* and *Marutham*.

**1. Kurinji:** The first and foremost *tinai*, *Kurinji* is filled with dense forests and gigantic mountains. *Kuravars*, *Vetars* and *Kanavars* were the major tribes over there. They often hunted animals and gathered forest produce- honey, pepper, spices etc. Due to insurmountable terrain and geographical barriers, they had a hard time cultivating crops of their own choice.

They worshiped - Lord *Muruga*.

**2. Mullai:** The green lush hectares of land mainly ideally suited for pastoralism comprised the *Mullai tinai*. *Itayar* and *Ayar* were the tribes commonly found around *Mullai*. Their main source of livelihood was cattle rearing but also resorted to terrace cultivation. They were not nomads like the inhabitants of *Kurinji* and were self-reliant. They worshiped Lord *Mayon*.

**3. Palai:** Dry, rough patches of land which could not be easily cultivated constituted the *Palai tinai*. The tribes, *Maravar*, *Kallar*, *Vettar* found barren plateaus suitable to engage in plunder and warfare. The people enlisted themselves to

fight for chieftains who owned resources and were not ready to cultivate as the land was non-productive. People of other *tinais* were scared of traveling through *Palai*, as this scarcely inhabited *tinai* was the haven of plunderers. They were considered the least socially evolved when compared to others and often prayed to Goddess *Kottavai* before they embarked on raids or plunder.

**4. Marutham:** Wet, marshy lands that were fit for cultivation comprised the *Marutham* *tinai*. The inhabitants, *Uzhavars* and *Vellalars* made use of plough made to easily cultivate the entire land, growing paddy and other food grains. They emerged to be self-sufficient than other *tinais* and worshipped the god of gods, *Indra*.

**5. Neythal:** Last but not the least, the fifth *tinai*, *Neythal* was ranked above the others. The *tinai* assisted *Tamilakam* to produce food, trade goods overseas and welcome goods that arrived from abroad. The coastal regions framed by breathtaking backwaters were brought under *Neythal tinai*. The inhabitants, *Parathavars*, *Valayars*, *Minavars*, *Nulayars*, *Umanars*, etc were engaged in producing salt, diving deep for pearls, catching fish and sailing boats.

The *tinais* depended on each other for goods they could not produce. The inhabitants of *Marutham* relied on *Mullai* for dairy, ragi and horse gram. Those who were keen on eating pulses, honey, and meat relied on *Kurinji*. Residents of *Kurinji*, *Mullai*, *Palai* relied upon *Neythal* for fish, salt and pearls. The *tinais* mutually co-existed with each other and accordingly, the *Aintinai* transformed into one single landscape comprising five units.

## ***Vanpulam and Menpulam***

Parallel to the *tinai* classification, there was also the categorisation of land in *Tamilakam* into two: *Vanpulam* and *Menpulam*. *Vanpulam* referred to the *Mullai* and *Kurinji* *tinais*, which produced pulses, grains etc. *Vanpulam* was often considered less productive land and the people often resorted to plunder and raids to grab hold of resources. *Menpulam* comprised of *Marutham* which produced paddy and sugarcane. It comprised arable land where people were often engaged in cultivating crops, thereby becoming self-sufficient.

### **3.2.2 *Tinai* as Poetic Image**

Earlier historians and scholars of literature were trying to look at the *tinai* classification of *Tamilakam* as a literary convention. Accordingly, they tried to describe the nature of the social setting. The poems gave character and life to each of those regions which made its descriptions richer. The *Sangam* poems were roughly divided into two- ‘*Akam*’ and ‘*Puram*’ poetry.

While ‘*Akam*’ poems brooded over human emotions and relationships-love, sorrow etc. ‘*Puram*’ poems dealt with war, death, anger, courage etc. Accordingly, in ‘*Akam*’ poems, *Tamilakam* was categorised into five *tinais*- *Kurinji*, *Mullai*, *Palai*, *Neythal* and *Marutham*. Each *tinai* witnessed a particular stage in human relationships- pursuing love before the act of marriage or even squabbles post- marriage.

The first *tinai*, *Kurinji* was suitable for lovers who eloped to begin a new life to hide amidst the huge dark mountains. The *Sangam* poems described in detail of lovers who were eager to embrace themselves despite wild animals roaring

Which <i>tinai</i> ?	What were its features?	What significance did it present?
<i>Kurinji</i>	Dense forests and mountains	Elopement of lovers
<i>Mullai</i>	Pastoral Land	Yearning for one's lover
<i>Palai</i>	Barren land	Striving hard to reunite with one's lover
<i>Neythal</i>	Coastal Areas	Lovers in distress
<i>Marutham</i>	Marshy Swamps	Quarreling between each other

#### Poetic Imagery in Respective *Tinais*

from behind and noises of wilderness. The lovers found the landscape an excellent backdrop for expressing their love for each other.

The next *tinai*, *Mullai* symbolised the yearning of the girl for her lover. The forests indicate dusk, the time at which the girl waits ardently and hopeful for her lover to come back to her.

*Marutham*, the land of wet paddy fields, was where the most exciting scene of action unfolded. Poems describe how the woman sulked and threw tantrums as her lover would go in search for another woman. The landscape often symbolised the time - before sunrise when the couples would begin squabbling.

*Neythal*, the land of coastal tracts, indicated the time when lovers had to move on separate ways. The *Sangam* poems describe *Neythal* as the land where the distraught lovers would live their lives in grief, accompanied by the coastal scene where fishermen caught fish, crabs skidding against sand and the stench of fish being dried.

*Palai*, the dry land was where the man withstood the obstacles of nature, robbers and time to unite with the love of his life. He strove to be reunited with his beloved, despite robbers who were waiting for an opportunity, prying eyes of wild animals, harsh terrain.

#### 3.2.3 *Tinais* as a Concept of Social Evolution

The earliest kings emerged from the *Marutham*, and the earliest towns emerged in *Marutham* and *Neythal*, associated with the Cheras, Cholas, and Pandyas. *Marutham* had political and commercial significance, while *Neythal* had commercial importance. Important towns included Uraiur, Kaveripattinam, Madurai, Korkai, and Musiri. Pattinams were towns along the coast, while *Mullai* and *Kurinji* regions were associated with tribal stages, and *Marutham* and *Neythal* regions were associated with early urbanisation.

*Menpulam* in *Marutham*, were used for staple food cultivation like rice and sugarcane. *Vanpulam*, larger fields in other *tinais*, were used for pulses, millets,

sesame, horse-gram, roots, vegetables, fruits, and other crops depending on the specific *tinai*'s growth potential. Plough agriculture was practiced in Tamilakam, with bullocks harnessed to a crossbar at their necks. The plough, known as the *meli* or *nanjil*, was iron-tipped and required deep ploughing for crops like sugarcane and rice. Ploughshares, shovels, hoes, and sickles were used for a variety of purposes. Excavations revealed furnaces and iron slag. Buffaloes were yoked to the plough, and animals were used at various stages of agricultural production. Tank irrigation and irrigation from minor dams were accessible via sluices and harnessed streams. An ancient reservoir was discovered near Kaveripattinam in Tamilakam, where irrigation was deemed necessary due to low rainfall.

People engaged in agricultural activities such as weeding, clearing fields,

planting seeds, guarding crops, husking, winnowing, and pounding grain in both *menpulam* and *vanpulam*, as depicted in folk songs. Despite both men and women participating in these activities, there was a gendered division of labour. Land was collectively owned, and debts were called *katam* or *katan*. Exchange took place in *avanam* or *ankati*, where *kurietirppai* was a loan of goods to be paid back in exchange.

*Uzhavar* and *Vellalar* were land cultivators, with *Adiyor* likely referring to slaves and *vinaivalar* referring to workers earning wages. Family labour was insufficient for production, leading to surplus. Agrarian settlements supported various groups of functionaries, such as blacksmiths, carpenters, bards, dancers, magicians, priests, and monks. *Sangam* compositions provide insight into the agricultural process.

## Recap

- ◆ The *Sangam* poems are divided into 'Akam' and 'Puram' poems. When 'Akam' deals with love and relationships, *Puram* deals with wars, kings, etc.
- ◆ In 'Akam' poetry, *Tamilakam* was divided into five *tinais* in which each *tinai* was known for a specific phase in love and relationships.
- ◆ *Aintinai* comprises five *tinais*- *Kurinji*, *Mullai*, *Palai*, *Marutham* and *Neythal*.
- ◆ *Kurinji*, the land of heavy, impenetrable forests, *Mullai*, the land of green pastures, *Palai*, barren land, *Neythal*, the land of coastal regions and *Marutham*, the land of paddy fields.

## Objective Questions

1. What does the word *Aintinai* mean?
2. Which all were the five *tinais*?

3. Which *tinai* comprised barren land?
4. Who were the inhabitants of *Kurinji*?
5. Which *tinai* was characterised by coastal regions?
6. Which *tinai* had paddy fields?
7. Which all categories of *Sangam* poetry divided into, with respect to poetic imagery?
8. How is love expressed in *Mullai tinai*?
9. In which *tinai* were marshy lands found?
10. Which set of poems were about love and relationships?

## Answers

1. *Aintinai* refers to the five physiographic divisions of *Tamilakam*.
2. *Kurinji, Mullai, Palai, Neythal, Marutham*
3. *Palai*
4. *Kanavar, Kuravar, Vettar*
5. *Neythal*
6. *Marutham*
7. *Akam and Puram* poetry
8. *Mullai*- where the girl waits patiently for her lover.
9. *Marutham*
10. *Akam* Poetry

## Assignments

1. Critically examine the ecological and occupational characteristics of the five *tinais* (*Aintinai*) in early *Tamilakam*.
2. Discuss the interdependence of the *Aintinai* regions in the context of material

- production, trade, and social organization
3. Analyse how the concept of tinai classification was employed in Sangam literature, particularly in Akam poetry, to symbolize human emotions and relationships.
  4. Evaluate the socio-political and economic distinctions between Vanpulam and Menpulam in early Tamilakam.
  5. Examine the role of agricultural technology and labor in the formation of early agrarian society in Tamilakam.

## Suggested Reading

1. Gurukkal, Rajan & Varier, Raghav, *History of Kerala: Prehistoric to the Present*, Orient BlackSwan, Hyderabad, 2018.
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## Tamil Polity

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ gain a general awareness of the nature of *Muventar* polity in Tamilakam
- ◆ familiarise with the Chera kings of *Pattittupattu* and their achievements
- ◆ acquire knowledge about the conditions of polity, society and culture under the *Muventar* in Tamilakam

### Prerequisites

The study of political evolution has been a focal point in historical discourse worldwide. To grasp the complexities of ancient Tamilakam's political landscape, it is imperative to delve into the modes of social organization and the mechanisms through which control was exercised over people and resources. Sources reveal a stratified structure of leadership, primarily categorized into three levels: the Kizhar (village chiefs), Velir (intermediate chieftains), and Vendar (sovereign rulers).

Historians have engaged in vigorous debates concerning various aspects of Tamil polity from its inception. The interplay between economy, culture, and society is intricately linked to the tribal polities that emerged during this period. For instance, control over resources like iron not only enhanced economic power but also facilitated military dominance, leading to the consolidation of certain chiefdoms. Moreover, the Sangam Age witnessed significant developments in trade, both inland and maritime, establishing Tamilakam as a pivotal hub in ancient trade networks. Ports such as Arikamedu and Puhar became centers of commerce, fostering cultural exchanges and economic prosperity.

To fully appreciate the nuances of this political evolution, it is essential to engage with both literary and archaeological sources. Sangam texts provide poetic insights into the societal norms and values, while inscriptions and material artifacts offer tangible evidence of administrative practices and socio-political structures. By integrating these multidisciplinary perspectives, learners can develop a holistic understanding of the factors that shaped the political evolution of ancient Tamilakam, setting a robust foundation for further exploration of the unit's themes.

## Keywords

Tamilakam, *Muventar*, *Chera*, *Chola*, *Pandya*, *Pathittuppattu*, *Virakals*

## Discussion

### 3.3.1 *Muventar* Chieftains

How did the people live during the early historic age in Tamilakam? How did they eventually decide upon a chieftain to tend to their needs? Man found that living in a community was beneficial for him to gather resources and his needs being satiated. Rajan Gurukkal narrated on how people gathered produce through plunder or even by raids. They organised themselves based on kinship from which they chose a chief whom they called *Kilar*. The *kilar* ensured that the resources were distributed among the group.

The next level of chieftains, *velir* had more resources and were powerful than the *kilar*. The most powerful of them all assumed the title, *ventar* who brought others under their control by invading their lands. They established their spheres of power by bringing others under their control, expelling those who committed delinquency and pursued territories with matrimonial alliances.

Of the *ventars*, three of them emerged powerful- Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas, later called *Muventar*. The *Muventar*

simultaneously controlled different people at different places at Tamilakam. There was no sort of hierarchy between the *Muventar*. It wasn't an organised or systematic division of power.

*Muventar* refers to the three main chiefdoms - Chera, Chola and Pandya. It was concluded that they gained the upper hand in *Tamilakam*, the geographical zone that included most parts of present-day Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

#### 1. Cholas

The Cholas were one of the most powerful chiefdoms who exercised control even after the period of *Sangam* poetry. They controlled significant areas from their stronghold, *Uraiur*. They had a tiger as their emblem.



Fig 3.3.1 Emblems of Cholas

The most prominent ruler among the Cholas was Karikala Chola. He managed

to emerge victorious after defeating Cheras in the Battle of Venni and nine chieftains in the Battle of Vahaipparandalai. He ordered to reclaim forest land and made irrigation feasible. He was known for the construction of Kallanai dam over Kaveri river.

## 2. Pandyas



Fig 3.3.2 Emblems of Pandyas

The Pandyas had created an atmosphere for the *Sangam* literature to flourish and scale heights. Nedunjeliyan, the Pandyan ruler, won the Battle of Talaiyalanganam against the Chera-Chola alliance. Their capital was at Madurai. Their emblem is fish and their goddess is Meenakshi whose eyes are like that of a fish.

## 3. Cheras



Fig 3.3.3 Emblem of Cheras

Who exactly were the Cheras? Did they have any connection with present-day Kerala? The Cheras had control over several parts of Kerala as well as Tamil Nadu. The Cheras were too powerful and made everyone shake in fear. The Cheras had their capital usually at Vanchi and their emblem was the bow & arrow. *Patittupattu* was a compilation of ten sets of ten songs about Chera chiefs, where each set magnificently captures the heroic

exploits of each chief.

### 3.3.2 Chera kings of *Pattitupattu*

A few of the Chera chieftains and their achievements are listed below:

#### 3.3.2.1 Utiyan Cheralatan

Utiyan Cheralatan was the hero hailed in the first decade of *Patittupattu*. He also had the title ‘Vanavaramban’ which means ‘beloved one of the gods and *Perumchettiyan*’. The title may be an indication of the grand, scrumptious feasts he offered in honour of his deceased ancestors. He was defeated by the Chola chieftain, Karikala in the Battle of Venni and out of humiliation, he took his own life following the practice ‘*Vadakkirikkal*’, starving oneself to death facing north. In all probability, this was the custom.

The other Chera chieftains were,

#### 3.3.2.2 Narmudi Cheral

Known as *Kalangaikkani Narmudi Cheral*, *Narmudi* was the hero of the fourth set of songs in the *Pattitupattu*. Since the crown he wore for his coronation had a small berry, known as *Kalangay*, he was known as *Kalangaikkani Narmudi Cheral*.

This shows that even the titles of the rulers had stories to talk not only about their heroic achievements, but about their uniqueness.

#### 3.3.2.3 Vel Kezhu Kuttuvan

The incumbent chief was known as *Kadalpirakottiya Kuttuvan* as he managed to ward off enemies on the sea with immense courage. He was sometimes known as the *Senkuttuvan* Chera who

brought down the stone required to consecrate the idol of goddess Kannagi at Muziris (presently Cranganore).

### 3.3.2.4 Adu Kottu Pattu Cheralathan

The name of this chief had emerged from the peculiar way he carried himself. Adu Kottu Pattu Cheralathan became famous for his love for dancing, singing and of course playing the drums. It was popularly believed that whenever he won a war, he would dance triumphantly with his sword in one hand. He treated poets and scholars with due respect.

Views on the age of *Sangams* put forth by historians like Sreedhara Menon are reproduced below. Regarding its nature of polity, it was nothing more than a group of clans and lineages which had unique exchange systems that revolved around kinship, marauding invaders and a unique distribution of resources. Many scholars often term the political structure of chiefdoms as hereditary monarchies. Power passed from father to son and it was through *Makkathayam* (patrilineal structure) that power was transferred.

*Ko, Kon, Kadumko* were the several terms used to address the chieftains. The chieftain loved his citizens like a father who would care for his son and was benevolent to all. He wore a magnificent crown and was decked with all the jewelry one could find.

The wife of chieftains who were accorded respect by the society was lovingly called '*Perumtevi*'. Polygamy was commonly practiced, while there are no references to polyandry. Girls weren't often forced into early marriage and widow remarriage was permitted. The women of

*Sangam* age had the right to choose with whom they wanted to spend their lives.

The *Sangam* economy was an interesting element to be studied. The economy was a combination of different economic activities taking place in *tinais* simultaneously. Hunting, gathering and shifting cultivation was practiced in *Kurinji*, cattle rearing in *Mullai*, plunder and robbery in *Palai*, cultivation in *Marutham*, salt manufacturing, fishing and finding pearls in *Neythal* were the different activities initiated in *tinais*. The chieftains were successful in controlling people who belonged to different occupations-salt merchants, pearl divers, fishermen, farmers and strived to protect them from harm. In ancient times, labour was based on kin and often didn't expand to members of other clans or lineages.

The chiefs appointed watchmen to look into suspicious activity all over the roads, who would keep watch with their torches. Any form of smuggling was banned in the kingdom and they had an efficient army to look after internal security. The *Cheras* had a wonderful navy which they used to their advantage to fight enemies overseas.

The people had their role to play in the chiefdom as well. Their presence was marked by the institution of *Manram*. Some scholars consider this to be the highest court of justice and it acted like the general assembly where people would gather around the local banyan tree to engage in discussions on matters that affected their daily life.

It was believed that a chieftain who would defeat over seven chieftains and more would be crowned as the *Adhiraja*. They would then grab hold of diamonds encrusted in the crowns of the defeated chieftains and make it into a pendant. Every chief had aspired to become an

*adhiraja.*

Another interesting practice that was common during the ages was that whenever a chieftain won a war, he would wear the anklets of the chieftain who was defeated. The tusks of the elephants of the defeated chieftain would be used to make cots for the victorious chieftain to lay down for a while and show his dominance. If one wanted to show his military prowess, the chieftain used his army of elephants to throttle the armies of the enemy chiefdom. Not only would the above happen, but poets, drummers and dancers of the chiefdom wandered around the battlefield crying out the success of their chieftain without fear of being murdered by enemies. A text named *Kalavali* has elaborated on the descriptions of what a battlefield looked like and what happened on the scene of action.

The *Sangam* works offer references to burial practices and how they dealt with the matter of death. *Vadakkirikkal* was one common method in which chieftains embraced death. Dying on the battlefield was more or less a common event these days. The people of Tamilakam believed that if they died in a battle, they would directly be welcomed into heaven. Women were also affected by the death of their near ones. Widows would have to shave their entire head, throw away ornaments and solemnly live their lives till death.

How did they dispose of the dead? There was no single way in which people were buried. They would either cremate one completely or in parts, which was called fractional burial. Fractional burial was when the bones of the deceased would be collected and buried along with miscellaneous items like flowers, ornaments, utensils, etc.

### 3.3.3 War and Hero-Cult

The soldiers were dedicated to chiefdoms, to the extent of sacrificing their lives for the chiefdom as they felt it was noble deed to perform. Throughout the war, soldiers died heroically -sometimes killed by their enemy or by even committing suicide when they had suspected their chieftains were killed. In memory of the those who shed their blood for the noble cause of war, they commemorated their valor by installing stones, often known as *Virakals* or hero stones.



Fig 3.3.4 Herostones

### Society of *Sangam* Age

How did the people live in the age of *Sangams*? Did they conform to rules and regulations? One of the unique aspects of *Sangam* society was that the full-fledged caste system had not come into being. The caste system had not come into being despite the evident presence of Brahmins and the practice of marrying within one's own community was in vogue.

Women exercised power in most of the spheres of society. Child marriage was absent and women had the right to choose their partners. Instead of *Talikettu*, the bridegroom would tie an anklet on the bride's feet which was known as *Chilampu Kazhi Nonbu*. There were two forms of marriage practised - *Kalavu* and *Karpu*. *Kalavu* literally meant getting married without the acknowledgement of parents while *Karpu* was conducted with the consent of parents.

### 3.3.4 Recent Perspectives

In recent times, some historians like K. N. Ganesh, Rajan Gurukkal, and Raghava Varrier have tried to evaluate the *Sangam* society using theoretical tools from anthropology. For instance, power of a chief was seen as manifested mainly in the form of predatory power. Descriptions of *vetchi* or cattle lifting as seen in poetry was the institution in vogue for exaction of resources through plunder.

The age of *Sangams* was the amalgamation of several economic, political, cultural and social exchanges by people who belonged to different *tinais*. Though they had a uniform culture, the age of *Sangam* witnessed an evolution of heterogeneous economies. The people of different *tinais* engaged in hunting, gathering, cultivation and production of several commodities. Agriculture and rearing of livestock became the most common forms of subsistence in Tamilakam.

The people belonged to different groups based on ancestry or descent. These groups then clustered themselves into clans or kinship groups known as *ur*. These *urs* relied on kin-based labour and became self-sufficient to meet their requirements. Therefore, no forms of rigid social stratification had prevailed during this period. Along with these clans, there existed Brahmins who followed a unique system of production and relied on non-familial labour. Therefore, Tamilakam witnessed the existence of distinct forms of production simultaneously.

Each group based on kin or descent had chiefs who were called *kilar*. The three types of chieftains, as we have discussed earlier were *kilar*, *velir* and *ventar*. They differentiated themselves from the other based on command over resources and

their ability to redistribute. There existed no system of hierarchy between the chieftains. Predation and redistribution of resources were the order of the day.

Rajan Gurukkal draws a sharp variation between narrative and reality. The chieftains who were projected as kings in poems shared nothing similar to the chieftains in reality. The poems of *Pathittupattu* certified the *Muventar* as kings and they possessed qualities of Vedic gods. Based on the bardic songs, traditional historians have tried to present a picture of Chera rulers as possessing large territories, having huge armies and being assisted by efficient bureaucracy. On the contrary, Rajan Gurukkal argues that due to the lack of periodical exaction of resources, organised army and political institutions, the polity was that of tribal chiefdoms and there was no possibility of them becoming a state.

On the division of society, K.N. Ganesh points out that the people were divided into *Adiyor* and *Melor*. While *Melor* comprised the uplifted section, *Adiyor* comprised the marginalised section. The *Adiyor* would eat *ayirameen* (a kind of fish) with white rice they got in exchange for salt they sold off. The *Melor* would relish *Unchoru*, which was a mixture of meat and rice. Gurukkal argues that generally the society was divided into *uyarntor* (privileged by birth) and *ilipirappalar* (underprivileged by birth). Similarly, another division based on distribution of resources had emerged- *puraivalar* who had excess resources and *iravalar* who had to depend on the *puraivalar* to live.

Regarding the existence of the caste system, Gurukkal points to a *Sangam* poem that referred to four clans-*panan*, *paraiyan*, *tutiyam* and *katampam*, as constituents of the caste system. A commentator of *Sangam* poems refers

to *parppar, aracar, itaiyar and kuravar* as the four castes. The *Tolakappiyam-porul* also makes a reference to *antanar, aracar, vanikar* and *velar* which did not correspond to the castes mentioned earlier. Gurukkal claims that the surnames of descent groups were misinterpreted as caste names, from which many historians affirmed the existence of caste system in the 'age of *Sangams*'.

Regarding craft production and other aspects of the economy, Rajan Gurukkal holds the view that the people of Tamilakam possessed knowledge of smelting, pottery, cloth-weaving, manufacturing of glass and other crafts. Craft-production has been referred to by the *Sangam* poems and classical accounts. The discovery of burials, rock-cut caves, and furniture made out of stone prove their knowledge in architecture. The presence of kitchen utensils, agricultural implements, pots have justified their ability to engage in craft production. The existence of iron proved the prevalence of a society that exacted resources through predatory campaigns and by plunder. K.N. Ganesh holds that agricultural implements including axes, ploughs, and sickles were used for cultivation.

The various skills of the people during the period can be discerned from literature. Gurukkal holds that the chieftains who controlled resources were able to command labour. The people who engaged in skilled labour like smelting and pottery held prominent positions in society and these occupations became hereditary.

Hereditary occupations also included that of *maravar* (warriors), *panar* (bards), *tutiyars* (those who played *tuti*, a small drum) etc. The emergence of *ventar* into prominence facilitated the requirement of hereditary professions, which ushered in social divisions.

How did the people of the age of *Sangams* exchange goods? The economy was not solely based on gift exchange. There was no element of profit involved in the exchange. These initial forms of exchange transitioned into broader forms of exchange where people of *tinais* exchanged goods for those goods they required. Reciprocity based on use value was the important feature of the exchange. Gurukkal emphasises the absence of concrete forms of market or trade in *Tamilakam*. Detailed discussion on the theme is given in the next unit.

## Recap

- ◆ The chieftains of the age of *Sangams* - *kilar, velir* and *ventar*.
- ◆ *Muventar*-three powerful chiefdoms- Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas.
- ◆ Chera chieftains of *Pathittupattu* were *Utiyan Cheralatan, Nedum Cheralatan, Adu Kottu Pattu Cheralatan, etc.*
- ◆ Traditional historians and modern historians held different perspectives on *Sangam* polity.

- ◆ The political structure comprised of the king, queen and other officials.
- ◆ *Makkathayam* was a system in which power was inherited. .
- ◆ The economy was based on appropriation of resources, reciprocity and redistribution.
- ◆ People were divided into *Melor* and *Adiyor*.
- ◆ Historians like Sreedhara Menon, Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai were proponents of a traditional conception of history, while historians like Rajan Gurukkal, K.N. Ganesh and Raghava Varier portrayed a modern perspective.

## Objective Questions

1. Name the different chieftains in *Tamilakam*.
2. Who was *Muventar*?
3. Who all were the *Chera* chiefs of *Pathittupattu*?
4. Which *Chera* chieftain played an important role in establishing the Kannagi cult at Muziris?
5. Mention the name of the stones erected in memory of chieftains who died.
6. Which was the work that provided descriptions of war?
7. What kind of an economy did the period of *Sangams* possess?
8. What was the practice of raising cows known as?
9. What were the two types of marriage in *Sangam* society?
10. Who were *Melor*?

## Answers

1. *Kilar, Velir and Vendar*
2. *Chera, Chola, Pandya*
3. *Utiyan Cheralatan, Narmudi Cheral, Adu Kottu Pattu Cheralatan, Vel Kezhu Kuttuvan* etc
4. *Vel Kezhu Kuttuvan*
5. *Virakals* (Hero-Stones)
6. *Kalavali*
7. Gift-Exchange Economy
8. *Vetchi*
9. *Kalavu*- Arranged marriage and *Karpu*- Love marriage
10. Those who possessed resources

## Assignments

1. Examine the hierarchical structure of chieftainship in early historic Tamilakam, focusing on the roles and distinctions among the Kilar, Velir, and Vendar.
2. Analyse the socio-economic organisation of Sangam-age Tamilakam through the lens of the five ecological zones (Tinais)
3. Discuss the cultural practices associated with warfare and heroism in Sangam society.
4. Critically analyse the reinterpretation of Sangam society by historians such as K.N. Ganesh, Rajan Gurukkal, and Raghava Varier.
5. Examine the socio-economic stratification of Sangam society as interpreted by contemporary historians.

## Suggested Reading

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# UNIT

## Trade and Urban Centers

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ know the importance of exchange in the *Sangam* economy
- ◆ gain knowledge about *Muziris* and other ancient ports of Kerala
- ◆ get a clear picture about *Pattanam* excavations

### Prerequisites

*Sangam* poems present images of distribution, redistribution and exchange. The term conventionally used for such transactions was ‘trade’. However recent historians have reservations in applying notions of ‘trade’ in the case of primitive economies such as the period of the *Sangam* poems. It is held that in earlier times, the economy had been a redistributive economy, where they exacted resources either through plunder or appropriation and distribution among themselves. They would also share their excess resources with dependents called *iruvalar* of the ‘age of *Sangams*’. There were several other forms of distribution and redistribution in addition to overseas exchange.

It was Hippalus, who discovered the rhythm of monsoon winds and its utilisation for eastward travel with the rest of the world. The foreign merchants who acquired knowledge of the winds, arrived at ports and harbours of Tamilakam to exchange their goods with the locally available goods. Goods like pepper, diamonds, animal hides etc were sold in exchange for goods from abroad. The Greeks, Romans, Venetians, and Arabs were the initial traders who exchanged goods with people of *Sangam*.

# Keywords

Trade, Gold, *Muziris*, *Pattanam*, Rome, Ports, Urban Centers, *Sestertius*

## Discussion

### Production, Distribution and Redistribution

Rajan Gurukkal elaborates how the economy functioned during the days of *Sangam*. He identifies five different ways involving distribution, re- distribution and exchange of resources. They are

- (a) voluntary offerings,
- (b) re- distribution,
- (c) gifts,
- (d) reciprocity and
- (e) formal mercantile exchange

In ancient times, the *ventar* chieftains could easily summon the people of Tamilakam to perform labour. Control over *vanpulam* and unsurpassed power over *velir* chieftains made it much easier to command labour. The *ventar* exacted resources through plunder and distributed them among the people. The economy of earlier times was a redistributive economy, where resources were distributed among themselves.

But here, certain people got a larger share of resources, while some of them had to depend on those who received larger shares of resources. Those who had larger shares were called *puravalar* and they re-distributed excess of their shares to the dependents called *iravalar*.

Redistribution was an essential feature of the economy and a system of

gift exchange prevailed. The economy was marked by a mechanism of exacting resources, for distribution and redistribution. Even the members of the community who did not involve in the production process were incorporated in the network and made eligible for a share of the resources?

Besides initial forms of exchange, formal and organised forms of exchange became elaborate. From the classical accounts, Tamil- Brahmi inscriptions and Roman coins, we find exchange routes passing through several parts of India and the world that reached several regions of Tamilakam. The ancient system of exchanging goods was prevalent- where commodities were bartered to those who required it the most and the people had no idea regarding concepts of profit, money or the need for a unit of currency.

A use-value system based on reciprocity prevailed during this period. Goods were bartered for other goods through auction and bargaining. This was termed as *notuttal* (barter system). The people of different *tinais* who produced different commodities arrived at *menpulam* to exchange their produce with goods they required. This suggests the requirements were based on use-value. Salt and paddy were the commodities high in demand as these commodities were required by a majority of people who belonged to other *tinais*. Goods were exchanged at permanent points of exchange called *angati* or *avanam* or occasional fairs organised at different times called *nalangati* (morning

fairs) and *antik-kadai* (night fairs). Perishable goods, clothes, artefacts and dried food products - fish and spices were sold in different fairs. Since these forms of exchange were unorganised, Rajan Gurukkal confirms the non- existence of markets.

There existed no standard exchange ratio on the basis of which goods were exchanged. Exchange was based on bargain and auction. Reciprocity and gift exchange continued throughout this phase, whereby when a good was gifted or exchanged, it created an obligation on the buyer to exchange a good. There are references to *kuriyetirpai*, a commodity loan where a good was exchanged for a promise to exchange a good in due time.

Inland exchange was labeled as brisk forms of exchange and people from several *tinais* arrived at these fairs caravans and carts loaded with produce, driven by farm animals. Exchange relations existed between northern and southern parts of India and goods like pepper, pearls and gold were heavily demanded. *Arthashastra* refers to the existence of high-quality pearls in the Churni river of Periyar.

Specialist merchants played an important part of inland exchange. *Umanacattu*, merchants who exchanged salt, a commodity that was heavily demanded, were one type of specialist merchants. They enlisted the *maravar* warriors to protect themselves from robbers while they travelled through *tinais* to exchange salt for other goods.

### 3.4.1 Indo-Roman Trade

Sreedhara Menon had stated that Romans demanded pepper in large quantities, which made Sanskrit texts call pepper '*Yavanapriya*' (Dear to the

Romans). *Agananuru*, a *Sangam* text affirms the same, describing how the sea would foam up as the Roman ships would unload gold in exchange for pepper.

It is true that Tamilakam witnessed the arrival of Greeks, Arabs and Romans in ships to exchange goods for the precious goods produced in Tamilakam. Pepper, spices, pearls, cotton, cloth, diamonds, animal hides from Tamilakam were exchanged for gold and silver coins, glass, copper and other metals. Rajan Gurukkal argues that these forms of exchange couldn't be called trade as no conceptions of profit, money or unit of currency had emerged by then. The Roman coins we find in several parts of Kerala were not enough to confirm that trade existed. It had been simply an extension of good-for- good exchange practised earlier.

Rajan Gurukkal clearly states that Roman coins were used as goods to be exchanged rather than a unit of currency. These elaborate forms of exchange despite not being able to instill the need for profit or unit of currency in Tamilakam, turned successful in bringing ideas from abroad, knowledge systems and cultural influences. Therefore, we cannot use the term these forms of exchange as trade due to the lack of a unit of currency and element of profit as well.

What role did the Roman coins play in the Sangam economy? The Roman coins discovered in hoards at various places of *Tamilakam* are not to be seen as the existence of currency. There is evidence to testify that Roman coins were used as goods for exchange instead of as money. Pliny, a Roman writer mentions that over a hundred million *sesterces* were exchanged for pepper and other miscellaneous goods India produced at that time. Since expensive goods like gold were exchanged for goods in place of salt and paddy, forms

of exchange widened. Moreover, the coins were found in hoards with holes inside them that suggest that it may have been used as jewellery or stored as treasure.

With the growth of transmarine contacts, there emerged a number of ports and urban centres. The classical geographies have discussed in length, the ports lying along the western and eastern coastline of India. The focus given here in the next sections are on the ports marked on the Kerala coast.

### 3.4.2 Muziris and Pattanam Excavations

What was the importance of the port Muziris? Though there is no place called Muziris today, the port of Kodungalloor is believed to have been once the ancient port. Known as Muchiri, Murachipattanam, Muyirikode, the port of Muziris was home

to traders all over the world-Romans, Greeks, Phoenicians, Egyptians and many others. Muziris has been credited as one of the most heartwarming places, where people belonging to different religions sought refuge to escape the clutches of religious persecution. Muziris emerged onto the trading scene after the discovery of monsoon winds by Hippalus, the greatest Greek navigator.

Muziris plunged to its downfall by the fifth century BCE. The entire port was submerged under sea, in the form of flash floods. Many of the writers of the time were well aware that Muziris was undoubtedly one of the magnificent ports of that time.

The only drawback, writers like Pliny pointed out, was that the waters were not deep enough for the ships to drop anchor. Thereby, ships had to station themselves

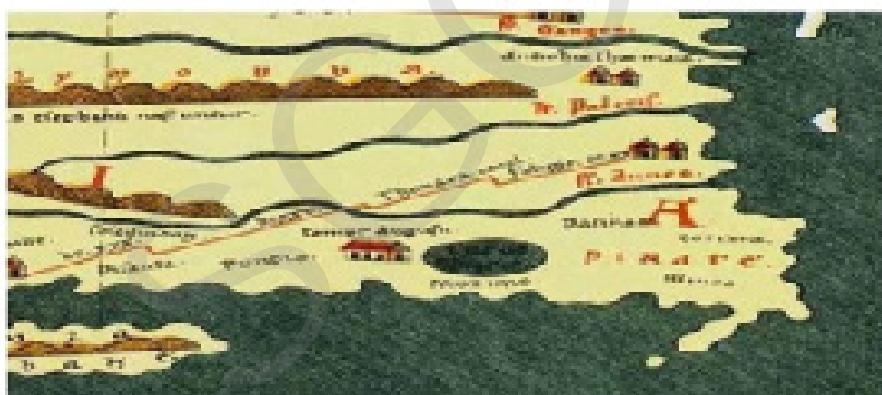


Fig 3.4.1 Muziris, Tyndis on Peutingerian Tables

further away and then had to load their goods onto small boats, *vallams* to make sure that the cargo reached safely ashore. Muziris was brimming with activity all around ships chugging along, tracts dotted by warehouses and emporiums to store all the cargo. There was a temple dedicated to Augustus at which over 1200 Roman soldiers were called in to guard the port and make sure that everything went well.

Tamilakam managed to trade goods

locally and made their mark in trade. Local traders were interested to initiate trade overseas and *Paranar*, the writer narrates how *Veliyan*, a chief who went overseas to earn as much as gold he could grab hold of. *Anchuvannam*, *Nanadeshikal*, *Manigramam* were the leading trade guilds in the forefront exchanging goods.

The role played by Muziris was crucial in widening trade in Tamilakam during the



Fig 3.4.2 Excavation at Pattanam

age of *Sangam*. After extensive research, many historians have claimed that Pattanam was the place where the port of Muziris existed.

From 2006, *Kerala Council of Historical Research* (KCHR) had been carrying out archaeological excavations for over nine seasons in *Pattanam*. Beads of glass and stone, gold ornaments, metals like silver, copper and iron, age-old Chera coins, a wooden canoe, a wharf structure that was used for ships to load and unload cargo, food remains, human remains were also found over there. Another interesting artefact they uncovered was *Amphorae* pots which had handles on either side, used to transport wine or olive oil and *terra sigillata* which were red, shiny pots that were believed to be used by Romans in ancient times.

After 2015, no serious work was carried out at the site for about five years. It was in the year 2020, that *PAMA- Institute for Advancement of Transdisciplinary Archaeological Sciences* began excavations. Their excavations proved worthwhile after a startling discovery—a seal ring with the picture of a sphinx imprinted on it (may have been worn by Roman Emperor Augustus Caesar) and a male head figurine whose hair was arranged like the Romans. This was more

than enough to prove the very existence of Indo-Roman trade.

P.J. Cherian strongly holds the view that Pattanam is the same as Muziris of the classical geographies. However, historians like M.G.S. Narayanan and Romila Thapar express their reservations about the identification.

### 3.4.3 Local Inland Trade

There were innumerable ports back in the age that facilitated the exchange of goods.

One of the most important ports was Tyndis. Over 60 miles away from Muziris, the port of Tyndis was known as Tondi in *Sangam* works. Tyndis are said to have been Kadalundi, Koyilandi or even Ponnani.

Barace or Bacare, another major port, made its mark in history that emerged around the *Sangam* age. Miles south of Muziris, Bacare had its advantages. No pirate dared to enter the waters near Bacare which made it a much safer destination for ships to unload cargo. It is assumed that it may be Kottanora or Purakkad of today.

Another port on the list of ancient ports was Nelcynda. This port was located in Kerala. The name Nelcynda emerged



Fig 3.4.3 Map that represented ports in Tamilakam

because of foreign influences for the past many years. Nelcynda was supposedly believed to be Nindakara of Niranam in Kollam and was located 60 miles south of Muziris.

Balita was assumed as Vizhinjam or Varkala. Naura, a port that was situated south of Muziris was sometimes recognised with Cannanore (Kannur).

Mantai, another port, was in the limelight till the 8th century. The port Vakai

is believed to have been a magnificent harbour during the age of *Sangams*.

The port Pantar which was recognised as the city of Koyilandi was known for its pearls. Even though they were flourishing ports of the time, their prominence slackened over time.

Many of these ports were commercially important, but their significance gradually declined.

## Recap

- ◆ The ancient Sangam economy involved redistribution, gift offerings, and resource appropriation.
- ◆ Progression of inland exchange and discovery of monsoon winds led to the development of overseas exchange
- ◆ Progression of inland exchange and discovery of monsoon winds- overseas exchange.
- ◆ Goods were exchanged at permanent points of exchange known as *avanam* or *angatti*
- ◆ Roman coins were used as goods to be exchanged rather than a unit of currency

- ◆ Muziris - one of the important ports in India, also known as Muyirikode, Murachipatanam etc.
- ◆ Nelcynda, Bacare, Pantar, Balita, Mantai - other inland ports
- ◆ KCHR and PAMA undertook Pattanam/ Muziris excavations.

## Objective Questions

1. What was the name given to the group of people who possessed a large proportion of resources?
2. Which discovery of Hippalus made foreign trade possible?
3. What was called *Yavanapriya*?
4. What made Pliny lament about the gold reserves of Rome?
5. Which guilds were famous for trade in Tamilakam?
6. Which all names were the port of Muziris known by?
7. The night market in Tamilakam was known by the name?
8. Which were the other ports of Tamilakam that flourished in ancient days?

## Answers

1. *Puravalar*
2. Discovery of monsoon winds
3. Pepper
4. Exchanging Roman coins for Indian products
5. *Anchuvannam, Manigramam, Nanadeshikal*
6. *Muyirikode, Muchiri, Murachippattanam*

7. *Antik-kadai*
8. *Nelcynda, Vakai, Tyndis, Bacare, Balita* etc

## Assignments

1. Analyze the Economic Development of Ancient Tamilakam:..
2. Examine the Role and Activities of Prominent Trade Guilds in South India:..
3. Assess the Significance of the Pattanam Excavation in Understanding Ancient Trade Networks:..
4. Provide an Overview of Major Ports in Ancient Tamilakam and Their Roles in Trade
5. Analyze the Trade Relations Between Tamilakam and the Roman Empire:..

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SGOU



## Decline of Tamilakam

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ know the internal and external factors that were instrumental in the decline of Tamilakam
- ◆ gain insight into the Kalabhra episode that hastened the decline of Tamilakam
- ◆ know the socio- economic factors that assisted the transition into the Second Chera kingdom

### Prerequisites

“Every beginning has a new end and every end is a new beginning.” This quote proves true in the case of the age of *Sangams* and the successive ages. Internal factors, as well as external influences, have been attributed to the beginning and end of every historical event. The warring tribes of Kalabhras, the emergence of the Namboothiri Brahmin community, changes in agrarian structure, and changes in the social hierarchy brought about the dissolution of Tamilakam. A detailed examination of the causes of disintegration of Tamilakam is necessary.

### Keywords

Kalabhras, Tamilakam, Brahmins, Temples, Parasurama Legend, Land Grants

## Discussion

Tamilakam disintegrated for many reasons, both internal and external. While some historians argued the Kalabhras episode had triggered the dissolution of *Sangams*, other historians claimed that the emergence of Namboothiri Brahmins, land grants, change in social structure were reasons that affected the internal aspects of Tamilakam.

Rajan Gurukkal finds an inconsistency in history by the end of third century BCE. As no historians were able to assign the period to a particular chieftain and no poems shower praise on chieftains, it was considered that the glory of these chiefdoms might have come to an end. There was no concrete evidence to justify the dissolution of Tamilakam. It was certain that a hiatus of two hundred years existed between the end of tribal chiefdoms and the beginning of a monarchy.

### 3.5.1 The Kalabhra Episode

Who were the Kalabhras? What role did they play in the dissolution of Tamilakam? The Kalabhras were believed to be peasants and tribal people who revolted against the existing social order and who managed to destroy the age-old supremacy of Cheras, Cholas and Pandiyas. The Kalabhras were furious at the Brahmins who were awarded huge tracts of land, for having forced them to farm mercilessly with meager wages and ill-treatment.

Historians narrate how Kalabhras established supremacy over the land and how the Brahmins were subjected to misery. The Kalabhras were known to be the cruelest and evil people of all lands as their mannerisms were considered erratic and barbarian. Since Kalabhras were brimming with hatred against the Brahmins, they started killing the

Brahmins in huge numbers. They began to collect taxes from them, making the lives of Brahmins a misery. The Kalabhras grew so powerful that they ruled over the land for three centuries-3<sup>rd</sup> Century to 6<sup>th</sup> Century CE.

The people despised the Kalabhras for why they eventually called the Kalabhra chieftains, the kings of *Kaliyugam* (Kali Age). Rajan Gurukkal comments on how historians claimed the invasion of Kalabhras as a reason for the decline of Tamilakam.

Most historians and scholars remarked this period as the Dark Ages in history for this very cause. Besides causing harm to Brahmins, they established an administrative system with a self-proclaimed king and launched attacks at the ports. Finally, the Pallavas, Chalukyas of Badami and the Pandiyas gathered strength to wage a war against Kalabhras and soon turned victorious.

Contrary to the above views, Rajan Gurukkal claims that such an invasion was not sufficient to become a cause to effect social, cultural and political changes in a society and that an invasion could only occur with the prevalence of inconsistencies in an economy. Rajan Gurukkal confirms that many historians introduced the possibility of an invasion to explain the end of chiefdoms in Tamilakam. Gurukkal adds that this dissolution of Tamilakam was caused by these inconsistencies in the existing system which was only deepened by this 'invasion' of Kalabhras.

A few inscriptions of eighth and ninth century alludes to a period of evilness where Brahmins suffered from hardships and torture, which was believed to be the

*Kaliyugam*, Gurukkal disapproves of the existence of a reason for which the entire Brahmin community in Tamilakam had to bear the brunt of the Kalabhra invasion. Gurukkal differentiates the situations in Tamilakam and Kerala specifically. Though Brahmins in Tamilakam were threatened by non-Brahmins including Kalabhras, Brahmins in Kerala were immune to the attacks of Kalabhras. Besides the Kalabhra invasion, it was a succession of changes that resulted in the decline of Tamilakam.

### 3.5.2 Land Grants and Transition Theory

Several historians including V. Rajeev agree that it was the changes effected by the Brahmin community in the social structure that caused the dissolution of Tamilakam. The famous legend of Parasurama where Kerala was believed to have been donated to Brahmins and that they were allowed to settle on the land in 64 *gramams* helped Brahmins to establish their legitimacy. From the age of *Sangams*, the Chera, Chola and Pandya rulers were enthusiastic about favouring the Brahmins.

They built temples for Brahmins everywhere in Tamilakam. To express reverence to Brahmins the chieftains awarded huge tracts of land to the Brahmins. They were also gifted jewellery and gold ornaments. Thereby, the Brahmins gained dominance over other sections of the society.

Common land paved the way to individual landholdings that was popularised by Brahmins. They were also able to impart their influence religiously as well. They possessed knowledge about agriculture and knew Sanskrit very well. Soon, the Brahmins earned powers similar enough with the *Sangam* monarchs. Apart from that, labour that was based

on family transitioned into non-familial labour. Consequently, labour productivity slumped down which hampered economic development.

The temples imparted religious instruction, provided education and acted as custodians of gold gifted by others. The *Namboothiris* gradually gained control over temples and its surroundings which was called *devaswom*. They were also entitled to land granted by the kings which were also known as *brahmasvom*. Soon, Namboothiri Brahmins assumed control and their opinion mattered the most to the king.

During the Chera-Chola war of the 11th century, as many of the small landholders and tenants went off for war, the landholders entrusted their properties with the Brahmins as they knew that the lands owned by Brahmins were immune to attacks. When they returned, the people lost control over lands and were forced to work for the Brahmins. They worked as *karalars* and *paniyalars* under the Namboothiri Brahmins who became *Uralar* (landlord).

The early evidence of the *Jenmi* system was indeed an element for why Brahmins assumed supremacy in the later decades and why Kalabhras made an early attempt to throttle their growing power. This was how feudal elements were interjected into society. But now nothing could be done to surpass the unfathomable power of Brahmins and this new political-social formation paved the way for the establishment of the Second Chera Kingdom in which *Brahmins* had their say. The emergence of a new social formation brought in the decline of the *Sangam* age and the expansion of agriculture called for division of labour based on gender.

Rajan Gurukkal examines the role played by *Brahmins* in hastening the



process of structural transformation. During the age of *Sangams*, the low plains were flooded all around the year which made cultivation impossible and forced the people to rely on fishing and hunting. The clans who relied on kin labour experienced difficulties in cultivating the land that was frequently waterlogged. This required a group of people who had knowledge regarding effective utilisation of water and seasonal changes, ability to command immense labour, organise specialised divisions of labour and used powers of coercion to enable labour.

With the help of Parasurama legend, the Brahmins easily acquired fertile tracts of land without an obligation to others. Their individual dwellings transformed into 'corporate agrarian settlements'. Using apparatuses of religion and caste system, the Brahmins could easily command a

greater magnitude of non-familial labour that proved effective in cultivating low lying wetlands with paddy. Kin labour was thus replaced by non-familial labour. This transformation took a period of around two to three centuries. This period also witnessed a series of economic changes- one, the disintegration of the social formation of Tamilakam based on redistribution and kin based labour. Second, the emergence of agriculture based on people who practiced hereditary occupations, which later developed into different castes.

Historians placed these different causes as the reasons for the end of Tamilakam. The emergence of Brahmins soon paved the way for the rule of Kulasekhara Perumals.

## Recap

- ◆ Reason for the decline of Tamilakam
- ◆ *Kalabhra* invasion is viewed as an external reason for the decline of Tamilakam.
- ◆ Changes in Social Structure and the role played by Brahmins as internal changes that caused the disintegration of Tamilakam.
- ◆ The advent of non-kin labour disposed of the need for kin labour.
- ◆ The dissolution of Tamilakam resulted in the growth of Kulasekhara Perumals.

## Objective Questions

1. Which tribe or kingdom's invasion was considered to have triggered the fall of Tamilakam?

2. Which kingdoms brought the downfall of Kalabhras?
3. What was the land of temples called?
4. Which age was called the dark ages of Kerala history?
5. Which age arrived with the arrival of *Brahmins*?
6. What kind of labour replaced familial labour that existed in the ‘Age of *Sangams*’?

## Answers

1. *Kalabhras*
2. *Pallavas, Pandyas, Chalukyas of Badami*
3. *Dewasvom*
4. Post- *Sangam* age
5. Second Chera Empire (*Kulasekhara of Mahodayapuram*)
6. Non-kin labour

## Assignments

1. What were the important contributions of the *Sangam* Age?
2. Explain the role of Kalabhras in the decline of Tamilakam.
3. Examine the theories that stated the land grant to the Brahmin community led to the decline of Tamilakam.
4. Analyse the socio-political impact of the Kalabhras rule on Tamilakam.
5. Evaluate the transition from Kin Based to Agrarian Society in Early South India

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# The Age of Perumals

SGOU



# Historiography

## UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ provide a comprehensive overview of Kerala's historical narrative
- ◆ explain the role of '*Keralolpathi*' in the historiography of Kerala
- ◆ describe the historical significance of the Perumals in Kerala

### Prerequisites

Although numerous works have been produced on the history of Kerala, there has been little effort to critically assess these writings or to trace the broader trends in historiography. This lack of evaluation may stem from a sense of complacency among historians themselves, an unwillingness to examine the intellectual foundations, influences, and methodological approaches that have shaped their own work. While a few recent efforts have been made in this direction, they often focus more on either praising or dismissing earlier historical writings rather than offering a balanced critique.

This situation is unfortunate, as it has hindered both students and scholars from developing a critical and objective understanding of past historical research and from identifying potential directions for future inquiry. It also leaves general readers without the tools to assess the value and reliability of historical works. Over time, value judgments and interpretations made by historians based on the evidence and methodologies available in their era, have often been presented as objective 'facts.' These so-called facts have significantly influenced popular perceptions of Kerala's past, sometimes without sufficient critical scrutiny.

# Keywords

Perumals, *Keralolpathi*, Historiography, Hundred Years War, The Golden Age

## Discussion

### 4.1.1 Legendary History of *Keralolpathi*

*Keralolpathi* is one of the oft-quoted traditional chronicles of early Kerala history. Writers like Pachu Moothathu and Sangoonny Menon while trying to narrate the past of Travancore had relied on *Keralolpathi*. Later writers like Padmanabha Menon, William Logan and the other editors of the State Manuals have also made mention of the references to stories in *Keralolpathi*. Therefore, it is necessary for students of Kerala history to have a closer look at *Keralolpathi* and its legends.

Unlike *Mushakavamsa Kavya*, the '*Keralolpathi*' chronicle was composed over a period of a few centuries. Historians consider that the final stage of its compilation was done around the seventeenth century. The chronicle has three major recensions; *Kozhikode Vazhakkom*, *Kolathunadu Vazha-kkom* and the *Venad Vazhakkom*. The careful examination of *Keralolpathi* shows that these different versions are the same with regard to their basic frame. Therefore, historians treat *Keralolpathi* as a work that contains truth in bits and pieces but not the whole truth.

Far removed from the spirit of academic history, *Keralolpathi* offers its readers a fictional account of Kerala's origins. A closer look at the legends and fables establish the point that it was written by Namboodiri Brahmins to stake claim on the land of Kerala. The stories

of *Keralolpathi* provide legendary origins and gifting of Keralam to the Brahmins. The book also gives justifications to the prevalence of a brahmin dominated socio-political order. The implications of this will be elaborated later.

*Keralolpathi* divided the history of Kerala into three ages, namely, The Age of Parasurama, The Age of Perumals and the The Age of Tampurans. The age of Parasurama narrates the story of Kerala's purported origins. The legend says that sage Parasurama flung his axe into the Arabian sea and reclaimed the land of Kerala. He distributed it among sixty-four Brahmin families from the north. Out of these sixty-four families, thirty-two settled in Kerala and the rest settled in Tulu Nadu. The legend of Parasurama's creation of Kerala is found in *Brahmanda Purana* as well. Similar creation stories around Parasurama in which he reclaimed lands from the sea and redistributed it among Brahmins is found along the western coast. Therefore, stories in *Keralolpathi* could have been inspired from earlier Puranas and similar legends. Or, these stories indicate a southward migration of Brahmin groups who carried the story with them and popularised it in places where they settled down.

The second age was the Age of Perumals. After Parasurama donated the land to Brahmins, he entrusted them with the task of administration. They were given training in martial arts. The Brahmins of Kerala became *Brahmakshatriyas* i.e. Brahmins who undertook the duties



of Kshatriyas such as administration and defence of the land. Some of them were trained in martial arts. Brahmins appointed guardians for administration called *Rakshapurushan*. Feuds broke out between them and the administration collapsed. Brahmins resolved to invite Kshatriyas from *Tamilakam* to act as kings. These rulers were called *Perumals*, sovereign overlords of Kerala who were brought by Brahmins every twelve years.

The legend says that the last *Perumal*, called Cheraman *Perumal*, converted to Islam, abdicated his throne and redistributed the kingdom among various local rulers. Since the ruler, Eradi brothers of Calicut was late to arrive he did not get territories. Instead, the *Perumal* gifted him the broken sword and broken conch and were instructed to conquer and advance. Thus, by the end of the age of *Perumals* began the age of *Tampurans*.

How does '*Keralolpathi*' qualify as a historical source? There is a definite incompatibility between tenets used in the writing of *Keralolpathi* and the standards used in modern historiography. It is a collection of fables and legends and populated by gods, immortals and supernatural events. However, the historian Kesavan Veluthat has argued that even works such as *Keralolpathi* express a kind of historical consciousness specific to the people of Kerala. As a work that remembers as well as imagines Kerala's past, *Keralolpathi* gives an idea about prevailing socio-political conditions as well as the biases of its composers, the Brahmins. It is revealed by the presence of such Brahmin legends of land reclamation in other parts of South India. The story had its origins in the Saurashtra region and moved along the western coastal line through Maharashtra and Karnataka to Kerala. This would suggest that Brahmins carried the story along with them in their

journey from Saurashtra to Kerala.

#### 4.1.2 *Elamkulam* and the 'discovery' of the Second Cheras

As we have already seen, the basic problems with early historiography of Kerala were with their overt reliance on legends, uncritical acceptance of traditions and their inaccessibility to primary sources such as inscriptions and contemporary literary materials. Early historians, often from elite and traditional families, lacked the expertise for judicious interpretation of available sources. Without academic training, they were preoccupied with antiquity and influenced by traditional scholarship. They studied about Western advances in the art of history writing in their leisure and tried to apply those lessons in the context of Kerala. Some of these histories were influenced by the nationalist discourse as well. As facts-laden tomes, these histories were products of their time.

A definite break with the past was made when Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai published his essays on early Kerala history.



Fig 4.1.2 Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai  
(1904-1973)

As a professor of Malayalam, Elamkulam was well-versed in the evolution of language and literature. He was adept in reading and translating ancient scripts such as *Vatteluthu*. His research led him to conclude that Kerala was once ruled by a line of kings known as Perumals. Elamkulam posited that Perumals were the emperors of Kerala who had control over Kerala. On the basis of his presumptions Elamkulam concluded that Perumals' empire was a centralised state with a centralised bureaucracy. As an absolute monarchy, Perumals ruled over the entire Kerala. At the same time Elamkulam also argued that Perumal state had representative bodies at the village level who ran the administration of lands and temples according to codes of conduct such as *Mulikkulam Kachcham*.

Elamkulam also maintained that the empire of Perumals declined and was finally dissolved at the end of the “hundred years war” with the imperial Cholas. Although Perumals succeeded in routing Cholas from Kerala, the long war took its toll on the state and society of Perumals. The incessant warfare weakened the central authority and strengthened *naduvazhikal*, the local chieftains. War transformed society as well. Elamkulam speculated that a massive transfer of surplus land to Brahmins had taken place during the time. This, according to him, was the reason for the beginning of the *janmi* (landlord) system. He concluded that it was the external factor of the Chera-Chola war that destroyed the otherwise golden age of Kerala under Perumals.

The invaluable contribution of Elamkulam was that he collected the available source materials and correlated them in a holistic manner for reconstructing the past. It allowed him to see the larger

patterns and discover a hitherto unknown lineage of kings who ruled as Kerala's overlords.

### 4.1.3 MGS Narayanan and the Perumal kingdom

Elamkulam's interpretation, however, was not free from flaws and gaps. With the discovery of further source materials and with the use of more rigorous tools of analyses it had become possible for M G S Narayanan to review the many of the presumptions of Elamkulam in his monumental work *Perumals of Kerala*.

Narayanan's history of Perumals broke new grounds in Kerala historiography. On the basis of a huge corpus of literary and epigraphic evidence MGS argued that Perumals were sovereign overlords of Kerala who “reigned” rather than ruled Kerala. Unlike Cholas, Chera Perumals' state was not an empire. They were rulers of a dynasty who had nominal sovereignty over Kerala's countless *naduvazhis* or local chiefs.

As the sovereigns of Kerala, Perumals received tributes from their local chiefs. They carried symbols of sovereignty with them as well which were exclusive to Perumals. The title of *chakrartin* was part of the exclusive signs of sovereignty that Perumals carried with them. The direct power of Perumals was confined to their capital Makotai, or Mahodayapuram and its environs.

In MGS' assessment, Perumals were counseled and controlled by Brahmins through their representative body called *Nalu Thali*. The Brahmin control over Perumal state was so pervasive that MGS later called it a Brahmin oligarchy. As there is no evidence to prove that centralised bureaucracy existed in early Kerala, MGS rejects Elamkulam's model of empire.



Fig 4.1.3 MGS Narayanan (b. 1932)

MGS also expressed his reservations against the speculation of the Hundred Years War. Instead of the story of steady and unbroken period of war and unfailing resistance prompted by Chera patriotism, MGS argues that Cholas invaded southern

Kerala and Cheras accepted their suzerainty for a period of three or four decades. This has been substantiated by temple inscriptions and speaks about the presence of Chola commanders in Kerala.

MGS revised the chronology of the Chera line of rulers using the data gleaned from literature and inscriptions. He could also bring out details of the last Perumal Kulasekhara Ramavarma who lived at least until 1124 C.E as testified by inscriptions. Despite the momentous findings of these two scholars, the real reasons for the emergence of Perumals and details of their decline or disappearance remain unknown to historians.

## Recap

- ◆ Perumals were the sovereign rulers of Kerala.
- ◆ They ruled from the ninth century to the eleventh century.
- ◆ Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai- Perumal state was an empire.
- ◆ Elamkulam- the period of Second Cheras- Golden Age in the history of Kerala.
- ◆ Elamkulam- Hundred Years War- Cheras and Cholas.
- ◆ MGS Narayanan- Perumal state was not an empire.
- ◆ MGS- Perumal state was a Brahmin-led oligarchy.
- ◆ Perumals disappeared in the eleventh century.
- ◆ The *naduvazhis* emerged dominant after the dissolution of the Perumals.

## Objective Questions

1. Does 'Keralolpathi' have an identifiable author?
2. When was 'Keralolpathi' compiled?
3. How many ages 'Keralolpathi' divides Kerala history into?

4. Name the ages as identified in ‘*Keralolpathi*’.
5. What was Prof. Kunjan Pillai’s greatest contribution to historiography of Kerala?
6. Who is the author of ‘*Perumals of Kerala*’?
7. Was Perumal kingdom an empire according to MGS Narayanan? If not, what was its nature?
8. State the reasons for the decline of *Perumals* according to Kunjan Pillai and MGS Narayanan.

## Answers

1. No, Compiled by a group of Brahmin authors
2. Around the 17th century
3. Three
4. Age of Parasurama, Age of Perumals, Age of Tampurans
5. Discovery of Makotai lineage of Cheras
6. M.G.S Narayanan
7. No, a Brahmin-led oligarchy
8. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai- The Hundred Years War. M.G.S Narayanan- internal and external pressures.

## Assignments

1. Compare and contrast the historical interpretations of the Perumal kingdom by Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai and M.G.S. Narayanan.
2. Discuss the significance of the legend of Parasurama in the ‘*Keralolpathi*’ and its implications for the socio-political structure of Kerala.
3. Explain how early historians’ backgrounds influenced their interpretations of Kerala’s history and the limitations they faced.

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## Source Materials

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ identify and interpret various inscriptions and traditional sources used in the historical research on Kerala
- ◆ understand why epigraphy is crucial for reconstructing the region's past.
- ◆ assess other kinds of written sources and consider their value and limitations

### Prerequisites

Before modern archaeological discoveries, historians of Kerala relied on ancient texts like *Keralolpathi* and *Keralamahathmyam*- a curious mix of fact and legend. These early sources fascinated scholars but left many questions unanswered about the political and social history of the Chera period. That situation changed dramatically with the unearthing of inscriptions and copper plates, offering concrete evidence from the past. In this unit, we'll explore those discoveries and see how they reshaped our understanding of early Kerala history.

Historians like Prof. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, working with inscriptions unearthed and deciphered by scholars such as P. Sundaram Pillai, began to assemble a rough outline of Chera rule. There were sweeping conclusions such as imagining a pan-Kerala empire under a single dynasty, the so-called Kulasekhara dynasty. Yet, later scholars, mostly M.G.S. Narayanan, cautioned against overreliance on unreliable or poorly dated sources. He pointed out two major problems: the uneven trustworthiness of these materials, and serious chronological uncertainties. Now let us turn to explore the variety of sources, epigraphic, literary, and archaeological, that have gradually helped to reconstruct the history of medieval Kerala.

## Keywords

Epigraphy, Inscriptions, Stone Inscriptions, Copper Plate Inscriptions, Excavation Reports, Bhakti literature

## Discussion

### 4.2.1 Epigraphic Evidence

It has been noted that the ninth century CE gains immediate significance on account of the availability of huge collections of source materials which can broadly be classified into **epigraphic sources and literature**. Epigraphic sources can further be divided into copper plate inscriptions and stone inscriptions. While copper plate inscriptions were meant to be kept by individuals, stone inscriptions were meant to be publicly displayed. Most of the inscriptions mention rulers and authorities.

#### 4.2.1.1 Stone Inscriptions

The stone inscriptions discovered in Kerala were mostly from temples. These inscriptions are found in the granite base or granite pillars of the temples. They are widespread throughout Kerala and indicate the general level of literacy among the upper castes. Apart from the information inscribed on these stones they also help us in dating the age of the temple since they form an integral part of temple architecture.

While there are *prasasti* inscriptions found in other parts of south India, Kerala was devoid of *prasastis*. As a source of dynastic and political history, *prasasti* inscriptions have been important documents in the study of ancient Indian history. Since *prasasti* inscriptions were not discovered in Kerala, it was assumed

that the region did not produce that genre of political literature. However, the discovery and decipherment of the Kurumathoor inscriptions in 2015 alters the above inference.

#### 4.2.1.2 Copper Plate Inscriptions

According to MGS, by the year of 2000, one hundred and fifty stone and copper inscriptions were found from Kerala. One hundred and thirty-eight of these are stone inscriptions and the rest twelve are copper plate inscriptions. Eighty of these have the regnal years of kings, or at least the royal titles. Twenty-five inscriptions are dated to the Kali or Kollam era. The forty-five that do not have exact dates are assignable to the period between ninth and twelfth century C.E.

Majority of these inscriptions are records of the resolutions of administrative committees of the temples. These are also recordings of donations made to temples by wealthy devotees. The most important of these documents is the collection of copper plates known as Tiruvalla Copper Plates. Often called the "first book in Malayalam," Tiruvalla Copper Plates consists of forty-three copper plates with six hundred and thirty lines of writing. It is a record of all the donations made to the temple over many centuries compiled into a single document. Two of the other renowned copper plate inscriptions are

Tarissappalli copper plate inscriptions of Sthanu Ravi and Jewish copper plate of Bhaskara Ravi. The former granted privileges to Christian community and the latter granted them to Jewish community. They have also helped the historians to analyse the evolution and emergence of the independent Malayalam language, as shown by A. C Sekhar and Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai.

#### 4.2.1.3 Problems and Improvements in Reading Inscriptions

It has been observed by MGS Narayanan that there is a likelihood of forgery in the case of certain copper plate inscriptions. This must have been on account of these being private documents issued to private individuals regarding certain financial exemptions or concessions. Further, the readings made by some of the earlier historians had certain deficiencies. In the case of all the inscriptions, these suffered from certain deficiencies with regard to the historian's reading of the text. However, the advantage of the copper plate inscription is that these enable us to

understand the contemporary social and cultural aspects of the Chera period.

A major breakthrough in early Kerala history was made when the importance of stone inscriptions was realised by epigraphists, archaeologists and historians. The pioneering work in the field was done by P Sundaram Pillai. The departments of archaeology in the princely states of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar district of Madras Presidency also made significant contributions to the field.

Although inscriptions do not grant historians a privileged peek into the political history of Kerala, these have helped them piece together the cultural, social and economic history of late antiquity in Kerala.

#### Travancore Archaeological Series :

An important step in the right direction was taken when the governments of Travancore and Cochin started publishing their archaeological findings. The lead in this area was taken by the government of Travancore which started publishing the **Travancore Archaeological Series (TAS)**, headed by the veteran epigraphist and archaeologist Gopinatha Rao.



Fig 4.2.1 Quilon Syrian Christian Copper Plates

As a multi-volume work, TAS was published from 1910 to 1938. The first two volumes were published under the editorship of Gopinatha Rao. The third and fourth were published under K.V Subrahmanya Aiyer and the next three volumes were published under the guidance of A.S Ramanatha Aiyer. The publications can also be found in Kerala Society Papers (1928-1933).

Despite its contributions to the historical scholarship, TAS had its disadvantages. The archaeological and epigraphy departments of Travancore did not attempt to write a new history of early Kerala based on their findings. It was because they misidentified the language in the inscription as early Tamil and consigned it as part of the history of dynasties in Tamilakam. Moreover, their published list of inscriptions did not follow a chronological order. These inscriptions were translated and published as they were discovered.

**Bulletins of Rama Varma Research Institute** : The state of Cochin was another Malayalam-speaking state where new breakthroughs have occurred in the fields of history and archaeology. The **Bulletins of Rama Varma Research Institute** published several Chera inscriptions from 1930 onwards. Unlike Travancore, scholars in Cochin tried to piece together fragmentary evidence and write a more complete history based on new findings. The discoveries in Deccan, Tamilnadu and dynastic histories of Pallavas, Cholas, Pandyas, Gangas and Rashtrakutas provided a new impetus for advanced research in Kerala history. One of these pioneers was Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai who discovered the significance of *Laghubhaskariyavyakhyā* and identified Makotai near Kodungalloor of the present day.

#### 4.2.2 Excavation Reports of Anujan Achan, K.V. Raman and Others

The contributions of P. Anujan Achan who was trained under Mortimer Wheeler as an archaeologist is worth mentioning in this regard. His excavations led to the discovery of a huge cache of Roman coins. Further, it was under P. Anujan Achan that thousands of artefacts including earthen vessels were dug up in 1945 from Cheraman Parambu. As an administrator, Achan headed both the archaeological museums in 1948 when it was founded and Rama Varma Research Institute. It was Achan's work that resulted in the enactment of Ancient Monument Preservation Regulation of 1910 in the erstwhile princely state.

K.V. Raman's excavation reports significantly illuminate Kerala's history, emphasising its ancient trade connections and archaeological discoveries. His research underscores extensive Indo-Roman trade contacts, evidenced by Roman coin hoards discovered across Kerala, dating from the time of Augustus (27 BCE-14 CE) to Nero (54-68 CE) and beyond. Noteworthy excavations at sites like Uraiyur (excavated in 1988) and Poompuhar (excavated in 1968) revealed ancient brick structures, Roman pottery, and coins, showcasing the region's rich trade history and cultural exchanges with the Roman Empire.

Several archaeologists and historians contributed to the excavations in Kerala alongside K.V. Raman. Notable among them was K.V. Soundara Rajan, who collaborated with Raman on several projects, including the extensive excavations at Kaveripattinam. Additionally, V. Balambal and A. Chandrasekharan, both former professors of history at the University of Madras,



played significant roles in related archaeological studies.

The Pattanam excavations, part of the Muziris Heritage Project, have involved numerous archaeologists and institutions. The project was spearheaded by P.J. Cherian, the Director of the Kerala Council for Historical Research (KCHR). Key contributors included V. Selvakumar, K.P. Shajan, and P. Rajan. These excavations have been significant in uncovering evidence of the ancient Indo-Roman port of Muziris, revealing artifacts such as Roman amphorae, Chera coins, and various types of pottery, indicating extensive trade links.

#### 4.2.3 *Sankaranarayaneeyam* and Bhakti Literature

The Bhakti movement started in the first millennium C.E in south India. It is believed to have begun anywhere between the fifth and ninth centuries and gradually spread to northern parts of India. The movement was advanced and popularised by poet-saints who composed poetry in praise of their deities. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the

Bhakti movement reached its zenith with poet-saints and numerous sects with their followers.

Bhakti is a form of ardent devotion, a form of personal piety in which the devotee imagines a more intimate, personal relationship with the deity. It emphasises on cultivating the personal bond between the deity and devotee as a path to salvation. The south Indian Bhakti movement had two great branches. These were Saivism and Vaishnavism. The Saivite saints were known as *Nayanars* who were devotees of Siva. The Vaishnavite saints are known as *Alvars* who were devotees of Vishnu. The compositions of these poet-saints which are popularly known as Bhakti literature provided crucial information on the period of Chera rulers.

Historians believed that the movement was a reaction against Brahminical dominance and caste-system. Recent research, however, has shown that it was a revivalist trend within Hinduism based on *Upanishads*. It helped to popularise the tenets of Hinduism in the new context of the first millennium C.E.



Fig 4.2.2 Mural of Cheraman Perumal Nayanar in Brihadisvara Temple, Tanjore

The literary evidence shows that Kerala was one of the main areas of the early medieval Bhakti movement in south India. The movement found support with a thriving Brahmin community, royal patronage to devotional arts and literature and a system of pilgrimages that connected Bhakti movement in Kerala with the movement in Tamilakam.

For MGS Narayanan, the ninth and tenth centuries in Kerala represented the final stage of the Bhakti movement in south India. It also happened to coincide with the zenith of Perumal sovereignty over Kerala. The Perumals were great patrons of the Bhakti movement and were great devotees themselves. As a matter of fact, two Perumals are counted among the great poet-saints of Shaivite and Vaishnavite traditions.

#### 4.2.3.1 Saivite Literature

The Saivite tradition has sixty-three saints. One among them is called Cheraman Perumal Nayanar, whom MGS Narayanan identified as Perumal Rama Rajasekhara. He is believed to be the author of the collection of devotional hymns known as *Ponvannattandadai*. As these are works of devotional literature the amount of historical information in them is limited. However, they reflect aspects of contemporary social life. Rajasekhara was also a contemporary and friend of Sundaramurthi Nayanar, another Saivite poet-saint. Based on this the chronology of Cheraman Perumal Nayanar is estimated to have lived before the mid-ninth century, prior to the rise of Cholas

under the leadership of Aditya Chola. This is because Sundaramurti's hymns recited in the temples praise the Pallavas for their power and grandeur which was the case before the rise of Cholas in the mid-ninth century. Sekkilar's *Periyapuram* and Sundaramurthi Nayanar's *Tevaram* are the other two Bhakti compositions that are valuable sources about the Perumal period.

#### 4.2.3.2 Vaishnavite Literature

The Vaishnavite tradition has twelve poet-saints, one of whom is Kulasekhara Alvar. MGS Narayanan has stated that this Perumal was most likely Sthanu Ravi Kulasekhara. He composed devotional hymns which were included under the title of '*Perumal Tirumozhi*' in the collection, *Nalayairamdivyaprabandham*. There are one hundred and five verses in *Perumal Thirumozhi* and it gives multiple titles to Perumal. The composition was recited in Srirangam temple in 1088 C.E. *Mukundamala* is a Sanskrit work of Bhakti literature that has given historians information about the Perumal era.

**Laghubhaskariyavyakhya:** *Sankaranarayaneeyam*, otherwise called '*Laghubhaskariyavyakhya*' by Sankaranarayana, is a commentary on the celebrated astronomer of the Gupta period, Bhaskara. The work is of importance in assessing the significance of Mahodayapuram, the capital city of Cheras as well as it helps historians in the assessment of the advancements in astronomy during the period of Cheras.

## Recap

- ◆ Two major source categories: Epigraphic (stone and copper plates) and Literary (Bhakti literature and scientific treatises)
- ◆ Stone inscriptions were public, while copper plates were private
- ◆ Major collections include Tiruvalla, Tarissappalli, and Jewish copper plates
- ◆ Travancore Archaeological Series pioneered systematic documentation
- ◆ Pattanam excavations confirmed Indo-Roman trade
- ◆ Bhakti literature offers religious and social insights
- ◆ *Sankaranarayaneeyam*, also known as '*Laghubhaskariyavyakhya*', is an astronomical treatise.
- ◆ '*Sankaranarayaneeyam*' provides insights on Mahodayapuram and the state of astronomy during the Chera period.

## Objective Questions

1. What are the two kinds of epigraphic sources available for the Chera period?
2. Where are stone inscriptions found in Kerala?
3. When was the first *prasasti* inscription discovered and deciphered in Kerala?
4. What do inscriptions speak of mostly?
5. What is P. Sundaram Pillai known for?
6. When did the Travancore Archaeological Series start publishing?
7. Who were the editors of the Travancore Archaeological Series?
8. Who was the noted archaeologist under whom P. Anujan Achan was trained in archaeology?
9. What is Bhakti?

10. Which are the two main branches of the Bhakti movement?
11. What were Vaisnavite and Saivite saints called?
12. Who were the two *Perumals* honoured as great poet-saints in Bhakti tradition?
13. Who is believed to be the author of *Ponvannattandadai*?
14. Who is believed to be the author of '*Perumal Tirumozhi*'?
15. Which Sanskrit Bhakti text is used as a source for the Chera period?
16. What is '*Laghubhaskariyavyakhyā*'?
17. Who is the author of '*Laghubhaskariyavyakhyā*'?
18. Why was '*Laghubhaskariyavyakhyā*' considered as a source for the Perumal period?

## Answers

1. Stone Inscriptions and Copper Plate Inscriptions
2. Temples
3. 2015
4. About authorities and temple administration
5. Groundbreaking work in epigraphy
6. 1910
7. Gopinatha Rao, K.V Subrahmanya Aiyer and A.S Ramanatha Aiyer
8. Mortimer Wheeler
9. A form of ardent devotion
10. Vaishnavism and Saivism
11. Alvars and Nayanars
12. Perumals Rama Rajasekhara and Sthanu Ravi Kulasekhara

13. Rama Rajasekhara
14. Sthanu Ravi Kulasekhara
15. *Mukundamala*
16. An astronomical treatise
17. Sankaranarayana
18. Primary source about Mahodayapuram and progress of astronomy during Perumal times

## Assignments

1. Describe the contributions of epigraphic evidence to the study of Kerala's history. How have stone and copper plate inscriptions helped historians?
2. Examine the role of early historians such as Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai and MGS Narayanan in reconstructing the history of the Chera period. How did their methodologies and findings differ?
3. Analyse the impact of the Bhakti movement on the socio-cultural landscape of Kerala during the Chera period. How did the movement's Saivite and Vaishnavite traditions manifest in Kerala?
4. Evaluate the contributions of archaeological discoveries and publications, such as the Travancore Archaeological Series, to our understanding of early Kerala history. What were some of the challenges faced in this field?

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## Political Structure

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ describe the geographic, cultural, and economic characteristics of the Perumal Kingdom
- ◆ explain the political structure of the Perumal Kingdom, including its governance, administrative systems, and key figures
- ◆ discuss its historical and strategic importance as well as the cultural life in the kingdom

### Prerequisites

The first clue about the identity of the Perumals come from the legends of *Keralolpathi*. It refers to the Perumals as Cheraman Perumals. The word Cheraman is regarded as synonymous with Cheras. As one of the major ruling houses of early Tamilakam, Cheras had a number of branches. These houses controlled different parts of Tamilakam. The main line of Cheras were the Cheras of Kongunatu who ruled from their capital at Karur-Vanchi. The Cheras of *Keralolpathi* were thought to be the same as Cheras of Kongunatu. This had a number of consequences. For example, it is known that Cheras of Kongunatu declined around the third century C.E. The Cheras became a decisive power after setting up their headquarters in Mahodayapuram. It has been argued that the Perumal was the "lord of Mahodayapuram" and the "overlord of the entire Kerala." That is to say that he did not have absolute control over the entire Kerala. It has been found that several Naduvazhis ruled by Naduvazhis who accepted the ritual suzerainty of the Perumal of Mahodayapuram. Most of the inscriptions of the period of Perumals were issued by Naduvazhis. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai called this as the "kingdom of the second Cheras." The Perumal is understood to have been counseled by an oligarchic, Brahmin body called *Nalu Tali*.

## Keywords

Cheras of *Kongunatu*, *Karur-Vanci*, *Cheraman*, *Keralaputra*, *Keralolpathi*, *Mahodayapuram*, *Laghubhaskariyavyakhya*, *Senamukha*, *Gotramalleswara*, *Nalu Tali*, *Taliyadhikarikal*, *Mulikkulam Kachcham*, *Nurruvar*

## Discussion

### 4.3.1 Genealogy of *Perumals*

The discovery of the *Makotai* lineage of Cheras was a groundbreaking development. But was the label, second Cheras, appropriate? The term conveyed a wrong impression of the Perumal dynasty. The readers might assume that the Perumals of Makotai were the direct descendants of Cheras of Kongunatu who became the sovereign overlords of Kerala. It is impossible to prove that Perumals were the direct descendants of Cheras of Kongunatu. *Cheraman* was the common title used by the kings of Kerala. The term *cheraman* incorporates two words, *chera* and *man*, which means the son of Cheras. Here, the word *Chera* could mean both the dynasty and the territory of Kerala. The word *Kerala* is the Sanskritised version of *Chera*. There are references to *Keralaputras* in Asokan inscriptions in which the influence of the name *Cheraman* is evident.

Moreover, there were a number of ruling houses who claimed *Chera* descent including the ruling houses of Cochin and Travancore as recently as the twentieth century. Therefore, it is impossible for historians to say with any certainty whether or not Perumals were the direct descendants of Cheras of Kongunatu. That they were somehow related to the ancient Cheras is plausible, but the nature of that relation remains unknown. Thus, it is safer to address them by their geographical affiliation than lineage.

The discovery of Cheras of Makotai raised two new questions. How did the Cheras of Makotai survive the decline of Cheras of Kongunatu? How did they become the sovereigns of Kerala? The current consensus among historians is that the Perumals of Makotai emerged in the ninth century and it was closely associated with the growth of Brahmin settlements in Kerala after the third century. The rise of the Perumals was the political outcome of a social process that has been variously called “Aryanisation” and “Brahmanisation” of Kerala.

#### 4.3.1.1 Perumals of Makotai

*Keralolpathi* lists twelve Perumals but it does not help historians with either their names or chronology. The Perumals are simply addressed as *Cheraman Perumal* in *Keralolpathi*.

The names of Perumals were painstakingly reconstructed by modern historians. They discovered the names, regnal years and chronology of *Chera* monarchs from inscriptions and epigraphs. It was corroborated with evidence from elsewhere, mainly literary and epigraphic evidence from the Chola empire. The pioneer among these scholars was Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai who provided the first modern genealogical list of *Chera* Perumal kings.

**MGS Narayanan's list:** MGS has



Fig 4.3.1 The Political Map of South India c. 11<sup>th</sup> century C.E

updated and significantly revised the list and modified the chronology. He was able to do it with the help of a wider range of epigraphic discoveries and making a re-reading which included both a correction and reinterpretation of already used inscriptions. MGS has listed the names of eleven Perumals who ruled from c. 800 C.E to 1124 C.E. Despite the gaps in the chronology provided by MGS, he was able to place these eleven kings in a linear timeline as given below.

1. Rama Rajasekhara c. 800-844 C.E
2. Sthanu Ravi Kulasekhara c. 844-883 C.E
3. Kota Ravi Vijayaraga c. 883-913 C.E
4. Kota Kota Kerala Kesari c. 913-943 C.E
5. Indu Kota c. 943-962 C.E
6. Bhaskara Ravi Manukuladitya c. 962-1021 C.E
7. Ravi Kota Rajasimha c. 1021-1036 C.E
8. Rajaraja, Ravi Varma Rajaditya, Adityan Kota Ranaditya c. 1036-1089 C.E
9. Rama Kulasekhara c. 1089-1122 C.E

The updated list and chronology have

answered a number of questions about the Perumals. It was proposed by Elamkulam that Perumals adopted Kulasekhara as their dynastic name. However, MGS has shown that only two out of eleven Perumals had Kulasekhara as their suffix. Every king had both personal and coronation names along with their royal titles.

The real identity of Bhaskara Ravi was another issue that vexed historians. There were multiple series of inscriptions which had the name of Bhaskara Ravi but with different regnal years. This was problematic for historians. They speculated that there were multiple kings with the name Bhaskara Ravi. They argued that different series of inscriptions named different kings. MGS has shown that there was only one king named Bhaskara Ravi with the coronation name *Manukuladitya* who holds the distinction of having a long reign that lasted for fifty-nine years. Such a long reign indicates an early accession to the throne. Bhaskara Ravi could have ascended the throne at a fairly young age and a regent must have ruled on his behalf. MGS therefore concluded that the first series refers to his regent years and the second series refers to his actual reign since his coronation after attaining the age of maturity.

From inscriptions we know that the

third Perumal, Kota Ravi Vijayaraga, was the king's representative in temple administration before he became the Perumal. He was also the son-in-law of the second Perumal, Sthanu Ravi Kulasekhara. Therefore, the question of how succession had taken place in the kingdom arises. Did Vijayaraga inherit the throne because he was the son-in-law of the Perumal or was it because he was also his nephew? Or, was he selected Perumal by a council of Brahmins? There are no satisfactory answers to these questions. It is speculated that Perumals could have practiced the matrilineal line of succession.

#### 4.3.1.2 The Nature of the Perumal Kingdom

As soon as the lineage of later Cheras was discovered they were regarded as emperors. Was the Perumal state an empire? It is true that Perumals of Makotai reigned over Kerala as sovereign overlords. They exercised authority over subordinate *naduvazhi* rulers and chieftains who paid them tributes and promised them their fealty. Perumals were often addressed as Ko, and Chakravartin, imperial titles to which they had monopoly. Yet, can they be called an empire if it is to be judged by the standards of modern historians?

Contemporary historians do not hold the view that *Perumals*' state was an empire. One of the main features of empires are the wars of expansion. Historians have not come across evidence to show that *Perumals* undertook such imperial campaigns like the later Cholas did in the tenth century. Another salient feature of the empire is centralised bureaucracy. The Perumals did not have it either, or at least as of now historians do not have evidence that they did.

If Perumal state was not an empire, what

was its nature? Theirs was a monarchy, and as a monarchy they exhibited the normal characteristics of one but in reality Perumals of Makotai were controlled by a Brahmin oligarchy. Brahmins were able to do so by their preeminence in economy and society. They owned paddy fields and farmlands and controlled agricultural production. In society, they commanded greater respect than anyone else because of their religious superiority. In politics, Brahmins had close, intimate relations with the ruling house. It gave them influence over princes and Perumals.

However, beyond these informal channels Brahmins controlled the kingdom through more formal means. Through a Brahmin representative body called *Nalu Tali* they exercised institutional overview and regulation of Perumals. In fact, the Perumals exercised effective power only around their capital Mahodayapuram, around which was located the four temples of *Nalu Tali*. Therefore, we will now discuss their capital Mahodayapuram before we embark on a discussion of *Nalu Thali*.

#### 4.3.2 Mahodayapuram

On the banks of river Periyar, twenty-nine kilometers north of Cochin in Thrissur district is the town of *Kodungallur*. The city was regarded as a great emporium by classical geographers. It was frequented by traders from all over the world. No wonder it was regarded as the gateway to India. The city holds the unique distinction of having welcomed and fostered the three Semitic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is one of the major temple towns and a cultural centre of culture. The famous Thiruvanchikulam Shiva temple is located here. The Fort Cranganore, built by Portuguese in 1523, is also situated here. Kodungallur was the capital city of Cochin kingdom until 1341 C.E. Its historical

legacy stretches even further back to the first millennium C.E when it was known as Makotai, or Mahodayapuram, the capital city of the Perumals.

Mahodayapuram is widely believed to be the same as modern Kodungallur. However, it's important to note that despite the extensive information available about this city, much remains to be discovered. The landscape around the city has changed multiple times throughout history. Many regions that were once bustling centers of trade or cultural activity may have been submerged by the sea, while new tracts of land may have emerged in Kodungallur.

The capital city of the Perumals was known as Makotai, or Mahodayapuram in Sanskrit. One of the earliest references to Makotai appears in a ninth-century astronomical treatise by Sankaranarayana called 'Laghubhaskariyavyakhyā,' written during the reign of Perumal Sthanu Ravi Varma in 870 C.E. In this treatise, the capital city is described as a *Senamukha*, which, according to ancient Indian town planning texts, refers to a cantonment city with a royal palace. The Perumals' royal mansion, known as *prasada*, was located at a place called *Gotramalleswara*.

The city was situated on the seashore,



Fig 4.3.2 Tiruvancikulam Temple, Kodungallur

with the riverbank shaped like a bow (*karmuka*). It featured an astronomical observatory and a temple named Balakridesvara within its walls, along with several other temples. At the city entrance, there were temples dedicated to female deities such as Kali and Vasurimala, while the center of the city housed temples dedicated to deities like Shiva and Vishnu.

In addition to temples, the city had Jewish and Christian settlements, complete with synagogues and churches. The renowned Kodungallur mosque, or Cheraman Palli, attests to the ancient presence of Islam in Kerala. Its architectural features resemble those of eleventh and twelfth-century

Kerala architecture. Some historians believe this supports the legend that Islam arrived in Kerala shortly after the reign of the last Perumal.

As a Brahmin-controlled oligarchy it is natural that the most politically significant settlement in and around the capital city was that of Brahmins. Through their proximity to the capital city and royal residence, Brahmins exerted a powerful influence on the Perumal royalty. As mentioned above it was through *Nalu Tali*, a Brahmin representative body, that they exercised their power over the kings.

### 4.3.3 *Nalu Tali* and Hundred Organisations

It is necessary to preface the discussion on *Nalu Tali* with what is said in the legends of *Keralolpathi*. In *Keralolpathi*, after Parasurama's donation, Brahmins became the rulers. To this end, four *gramas* out of the original sixty-four *gramas* were selected to send four *rakshapurusha* each to govern. Feuds broke among them and the administration came to a standstill. The Brahmins brought Perumals from outside of Kerala. Since the original four *gramas* were far too distant from the capital to exercise their duty as Brahmin representatives, four new *gramas* nearer to the capital city of Mahodayapuram were selected. These sent their representatives to the capital and had seats in the city. With their presence in the capital, Brahmins exercised their control over the king through *Nalu Tali*, so much so that Rameswaraswami temple inscription in Kollam speaks of an atonement done by the king to expiate the wrong done to Brahmins. Such was the power of *Nalu Tali*. Initially the legend of *Nalu Tali* was dismissed by historians as fabrication but epigraphic and literary evidence forced a major rethinking on the subject.

Around the capital city of Mahodayapuram there stood four temples (*talis*). The temples were collectively known as *Nalu Tali* and played a major role in the administration. These temples were *Kiltali*, *Meltali*, *Netiya Tali* and *Chingapuram Tali*. It is necessary to enter into a detailed discussion about *Nalu Tali* considering its status as the representative temples of the four Brahmin settlements in the immediate neighbourhood of Kodungallur. Together they comprised a Brahmin oligarchic council which controlled the Perumal in matters relating to administration. The *Nalu Tali* acted as the Brahmin oligarchic council to advise the Perumal.

How did these four temples influence administration? The Brahmin settlements around Mahodayapuram had sent their representatives to the capital city and were stationed there permanently. The temples were managed by these Brahmin representatives. *Meltali* temple seated representatives from Mulikulam settlement, *Kiltali* temple housed Airanikkalam *grama*, representatives from Paravur were at *Netiya Tali* and Irinjalakuda representatives had their seat in Cingapuram temple.

All four settlements sent two representatives each to their respective *Tali* temples. Within these four settlements it was the hereditary privilege of select houses to send the representation. Thus, Mulikulam settlement's representatives were sent by Muttill and Kottamangalam families, Paravur was represented by houses of Elamtututti and Kadambanad, representative houses of Irinjalakuda are lost. Airanikulam was represented by Karingampalli and Curavalli.

These eight representatives were known as 'taliyadhikarikal'. They formed the council of *Nalu Tali* which advised the

Perumal king on the affairs of the state. Inscriptions suggest that they advised the king on mainly religious affairs including temple administration. The economic aspects of the temple administration meant that *Nalu Tali* had a strong voice in economic management as well such as remission of tributes and taxes.

*Nalu Tali* was one of the most important institutions in the Perumal monarchy. They represented not only themselves but the thirty-two Brahmin settlements all over Kerala. Thus, they were a Brahmin representative body which kept checks on royal authority. *Nalu Thali* also signifies the hierarchy of Brahmin settlements which had a uniform code of conduct. It is exemplified by *Mulikulam Kachcham*, a code of conduct that was binding to the entire Brahmin community.

#### 4.3.3.1 The Hundred Organisation

Although Brahmins influenced the Perumal kingdom through *Nalu Tali* it was not the only community represented through its members in the kingdom. From Perunna inscription of 1102 C.E it has been learned that on certain occasions at least the Buddhist Vihara of Trikkunnappuzha, south of Alappuzha, whose representative sat with the king and his council. Royal charters and proclamations were also issued to Jewish and Christian communities which granted them freedom of religion, trading rights and privileges.

Apart from these community-based representative bodies the government

had other administrative councils. The Hundred Organisation or the *Nurruvar* was one among them. It was one of the most important organisations in the kingdom.

The *Nurruvars* were a body of armed retainers who functioned as the police force in the *nadus*. Scholars have opined that they were the forerunners of the latter-day Nair militia. The term *Nurruvars* means a group of men who were counted in the multiples of hundred (three hundred (*munnurravar*) or six hundred (*arunnurravar*) etc.) . In the case of *Kodungallur* it was a thousand (*ayiravar*). Moreover, terms such as *nurruvars* etc. referred to the head of the retinue as well.

There are legends about the organisation that medieval travelers have written about. The legends say that *nurruvars* committed suicide at the death of the king. This was the ultimate display of loyalty and was fulfillment of their oath to the king. While the extreme nature of this practice made it incredible it was not uncommon in early times for the king's retainers to display this kind of allegiance.

Once a new Perumal ascended the throne he invited able-bodied men from noble houses. It was a voluntary invitation that they could turn down. If they accepted, they joined the king's retinue as his personal bodyguards. They attached themselves to the king's retinue and vowed to protect his person and property even to the peril of their lives. As the executive wing of the monarchy they carried out the king's order. They were the *kai* (hands), *kan* (eyes) and *kalpana* (command) of the king.

## Recap

- ◆ The kings of Kerala were known as Cheraman.
- ◆ The Cheras of *Sangam* Age were the Cheras of Kongunadu.
- ◆ The Cheras of *Keralolpathi* were the Cheras of Makotai, also known as Perumals.
- ◆ Perumal kingdom: a monarchy controlled by Brahmin oligarchy.
- ◆ Perumals ruled from 800 CE to 1124 CE.
- ◆ Eleven Perumals according to MGS' chronology.
- ◆ Capital city: Mahodayapuram (Makotai) in Kodungallur.
- ◆ Earliest reference: 'Laghubbhaskariyavyakhya' by Sankaranarayana.
- ◆ Written during Perumal Sthanu Ravi Varma's reign.
- ◆ Mahodayapuram was a *Senamukha* (cantonment city).
- ◆ *Prasada* (royal residence) in Gotramalleswara.
- ◆ *Nalu Tali*: Brahmin council of thirty-two settlements.
- ◆ *Nurruvar*: local rulers' militia for law and order.

## Objective Questions

1. What is the meaning of the term 'Cheraman'?
2. What do Asokan inscriptions call Cheras?
3. What were the Perumals of Makotai?
4. How many Perumal kings were there according to MGS' chronology?
5. Who were the kings who had Kulasekhara as their coronation name?
6. What was the coronation name of Bhaskara Ravi?

7. Did Perumals have a centralised bureaucracy?
8. What was the capital city of Perumals?
9. Where is the old capital city of Perumals situated today?
10. Which text contains the earliest reference to Mahodayapuram?
11. Who was the author of ‘Laghubbaskariyavyakhyā’?
12. What is a *Senamukha*?
13. What was the Perumal’s royal mansion called?

## Answers

1. Sons of Cheras
2. Keralaputras
3. The Cheras of Makotai, ruling from C.E. 800-1124 C.E
4. Eleven
5. Sthanu Ravi Kulasekhara and Rama Kulasekhara
6. Manukuladitya
7. No
8. Mahodayapuram, or Makotai
9. Kodungallur
10. *Laghubbaskariya Vyakhyā*
11. Sankaranarayana
12. A cantonment city with a royal residence
13. *Prasada*

## Assignments

1. Explain how the rise of the Perumals of Makotai is linked to the Aryanisation and Brahmanisation of Kerala.
2. Compare the political structure of the Perumal kingdom with that of a typical empire, highlighting the differences in administrative organisation.
3. Evaluate the significance of the Hundred Organisation (*Nurruvar*) in maintaining law and order in the Perumal kingdom.

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# UNIT

## Brahmin Settlements and Agrarian Structure

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ understand the origin and establishment of Brahmin settlements in Kerala
- ◆ analyse the impact of Brahmin migration on the social, cultural, and political landscape of Kerala
- ◆ examine the rise of landlordism and its effects on the agrarian economy and social hierarchy in Kerala

### Prerequisites

From the end of the third century, Kerala witnessed a steady stream of Brahmin migrants from the north. Historians have argued that there are literary references to Brahmin settlements in Tamilakam around that time. This means Brahmins had gained an important foothold in the south even as early as the end of the third century. As a part of ancient Tamilakam, Kerala was not an exception. It was a known landscape that the northern migrants colonised slow and steady. Groups of Brahmins migrated to Kerala from the end of the third century. It is believed that it was a long process that had continued until the seventh or eight centuries. The older settlers welcomed the new ones and newer settlements were found. The Brahmins expanded agriculture and introduced techniques that yielded greater harvest. Agriculture expanded and the economic structure of Kerala society underwent structural transformation. A definite cut-off date for the end of Brahmin migration is unavailable. However, the bulk of the major Brahmin settlements were found before the ninth century i.e. the beginning of the Perumal monarchy. This is because the preeminence and hegemony that Brahmins enjoyed in the kingdom point to their already well-established position. It is believed that they played a major role in the revival of fortunes of later Cheras and helped establish them as Perumals of Makotai.

# Keywords

Aryanisation, Brahmanisation, *Kadambas*, *Chalukyas*, Land Grants, *Chaturvarnya*, Landlordism, Subinfeudation

## Discussion

### 4.4.1 Brahmin Settlements

Why did Brahmins immigrate to the south? From which part of the north did they set off? Exact answers to these questions are unavailable but from the available sources, literary and epigraphic, historians have pieced together a broad outline.

Brahmin immigration was part of two broad, historical processes, aryanisation and brahmanisation of the south. Ancient Tamil poetry has references to Mauryans who campaigned in the south and *Tamilakam*. The military campaign was accompanied by an influx of migrants who settled in the south and propagated their ideas, beliefs and religions. The first wave of this Aryan immigration from north consisted of Buddhist and Jain monks and mendicants of heterodox traditions. They propagated their faith and influenced the native, local cultures significantly.

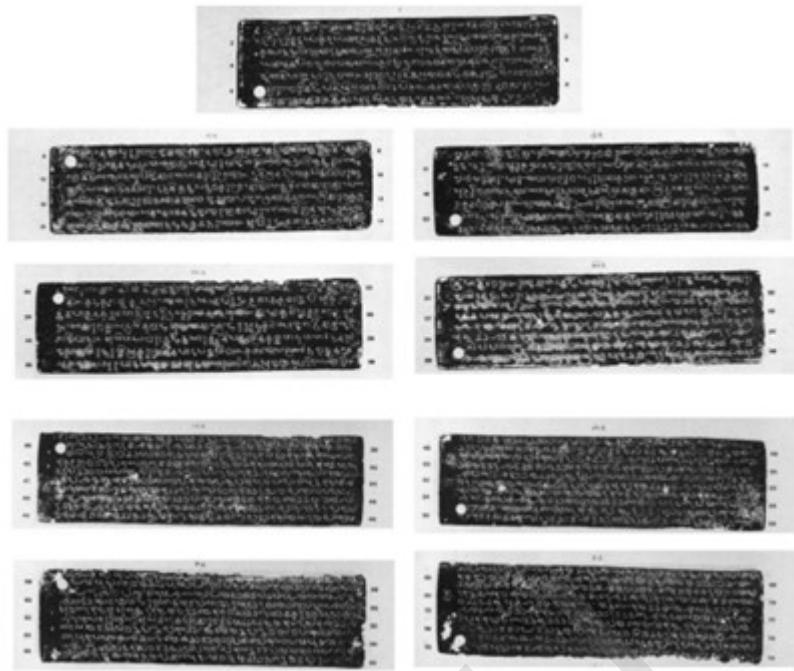
The first wave of Aryanisation was followed by a second wave of Brahmanisation. It is estimated that it began by the end of the third century. The Brahmins migrated from northern India and passed through western India before reaching the south. The long, circuitous route that Brahmins took has left its trail. One of the tell-tale signs of this continuous migration is the presence of different versions of Parasurama legend that spread along western and southern India. Although these stories differ in their details, their fidelity to the original story, in which Parasurama reclaims land

from the sea and donates it to Brahmins, is remarkable.

Recent research has thrown new light on this problem. It has been argued that Brahmin migration to the south was undertaken under the patronage of Chalukya and Kadamba kings who were great patrons of Brahmanism in the south. Brahmins were awarded land grants according to which they were given the right of absolute proprietorship.

The spate of land grants helped the Brahmin migration and expansion. With huge swathes of land under control they spread throughout the land. Their diffusion brought new lands under the plough and new peoples under their sway over whom they claimed and exercised religious authority. The economic dominance of Brahmins was super scribed by their social dominance. Soon, it evolved into hegemony.

The key takeaway from the literary and epigraphic evidence collected so far can be summarised as follows: firstly, these migrations appear to have had a definite pattern. Secondly, these were intended to spread and popularise Brahmanical social order. Thirdly, through the spread of the social order, the tenets and precepts of its religion were also promoted. Fourthly, as a resource intensive venture these migrations had the support of the contemporary state. Fifthly, states' patronage of Brahmanism helped patron dynasties to consolidate their power as it promoted a social ideology that popularised devotion to authority.



4.4.1 Velvikudi Land Grant Inscription from Pandyan Kingdom 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E

The legendary history of '*Keralolpathi*' states that Brahmins established thirty-two settlements in Kerala. Recent research has shown that this was indeed the case and modern historians have successfully located these thirty-two original settlements. In this field pioneering work was done by historian Kesavan Veluthat who has provided us with the list of these settlements. These are the settlements of Payyannur, Perumchellur, Alathur,

Karanthola, Chokiram alias Sukapuram, Panniyur, Karikkat, Isanamangalam, Trissivaperur, Peruvanam, Chaamunda, Irungatikkutal, Avattippettur, Paravur, Airanikkalam, Muzhikulam, Kulavur, Atavur, Chennanatu, Ilibhyam, Uliyannur, Kalutanatu, Ettumanur, Kumaaranellur, Kitangur, Katamaruku, Thiruvalla, Aranmula, Chengannur, Kaviyur, Venmani, and Nirmanna. Veluthat has stated that out of these thirty-two



Fig 4.4.2 Sreevallabha Temple, Tiruvalla

settlements twenty-four have survived.

#### 4.4.1.1 The Impact of Brahmin Immigration on Kerala

What was the state of culture and civilisation in Kerala around the fourth century C.E? Although its people had already seen state formation, the majority of Kerala's population lived in a state of "semi-nomadic, semi-tribalism", in the words of Kesavan Veluthat. Agriculture was practiced sporadically and in patches. The state of the economy was reflected in society and politics too. The society was organised around kinship ties. The states extracted tributes but it is doubtful that they did much else as there is no evidence for a standing army and bureaucracy. The arrival of Brahmin groups brought comprehensive changes in both the structure and orientation of economy and society.

From its inception Brahmins settlements in Kerala were founded along river banks. They settled near river valleys and paddy fields and expanded agriculture. One of the earliest settlements in Kerala, Cellur or Peruncellur, is situated on the banks of river Parassini in Kannur district. The location of their residential settlements gave Brahmins an indisputable control over agricultural production. As the owners of the land they employed tribal people as labourers who were then deemed as belonging to *sudra varna* and were categorised as lower castes.

The society also underwent a similar restructuring. The old order gave way to the Brahmanical hierarchy. It was reoriented to serve Brahmins who were at the apex of *chaturvarnya* (four-fold *varna* system) and caste system. Brahmins' growth was ably assisted by local rulers and chieftains. The latter saw in the former a valuable,

resource rich ally. Brahmins' control over agriculture prompted the rulers to strike up alliances with them that ensured a stable stream of revenue. On their part, Brahmins accorded the status of kshatriya varna to the local rulers. They were regarded as descendants of original kshatriyas of the north. New genealogies were composed that connected the local rulers with either solar (*suryavamsha*) or lunar (*chandramvamsha*) races of northern kshatriyas.

#### 4.4.2 The Rise of Brahmin Landlordism

Landlords are those who rent out their land. They may rent it out to others for different purposes but here landlords refer to those who rented out their land to tenants for cultivation. Tenants paid their landlords an annual tribute in kind or cash or both. The major feature of landlordism is the landowning class who do not work by themselves but leases out land and seeks rent by the labour of their tenants. This non-productive but landowning class held a great amount of power in the society.

The shift from landlords to landlordism happens gradually. When that class starts to own the majority of the land, control agriculture and define the relations of production an economy may be said to have passed the threshold into landlordism. In a nutshell the economy and society witnessed a restructuring. Historians have reconstructed the pattern of landholdings in the Perumal kingdom and later times through epigraphic sources. The legends of Keralolpathi, when interpreted in the light of this evidence, have helped as well.

Landlordism, or *jenmi sampradayam*, in Kerala started before the age of Perumals. Elamkulam had argued that Brahmin landlordism arose out of the

Hundred Years War between Perumals and Cholas in which led to a large transfer of surplus land to Brahmins and temples. MGS Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat have disproved the hypothesis. Instead, Veluthat states that Brahmins were well-established by the beginning of the eight century. The Brahmin power was one of the causes for the rise of Perumals, and not vice versa.

In Kerala, landlordism was ushered by Brahmins. The thirty-two Brahmin settlements housed a number of Brahmin families who held individual landed estates as private property. The collective name for Brahmins property was *brahmaswam*, or the property of Brahmin.

Their rights in the land were called *attiperu* in Perumal period, or *janmam* in later times. The rights of *janmam* were so extensive that scholars consider it the closest type of right (of the Brahmins) to be as good as absolute private ownership. However, Brahmins refrained from menial tasks such as tilling and cultivation of lands as it was regarded as unbecoming of their predominant position in the social hierarchy.

Besides *janmam*, there were other forms of land tenure prevalent in those times. Significant among them was *itayitu*, or *kaanam* as it came to be called later. The word *itu* means security to this day in Malayalam. It has been argued that *kaanam* land was leased out against a cash or gold security paid by the lessee to the landlord. ‘*Keralolpathi*’ described these tenants as *sudras*.

Below the tenancy rights of *kaanam* was the tenancy-at-will called *karanmai*. It was manned by a class of tenants called *karalars*. *Karalars* were succeeded in the hierarchy by *kuti*, or *atiyals* of later times, who held *kutimai* rights. This was occupancy rights for the otherwise

landless labourers who were employed by landlords and tenants for tilling the land and cultivating crops.

*Keralolpathi* called this arrangement *kana-janma-maryada*. MGS Narayanan has sketched it along the model of a three-tier hierarchy where *janman* rights of Brahmins, *kaanam* rights of tenants and *karanmai* of *karalars* occupy the three tiers. The place and status of *kuti*, or occupant labourers in this system has only started to receive the academic attention it deserves.

#### 4.4.3 *Urayma, Karayma, Adiyayma*

As the sacerdotal class, Brahmins’ life revolved around temples and its affairs. The settlements were organised around temples. Temples in early medieval Kerala owned huge areas of property. *Dewaswom*, or the property of gods as it was known, was temples’ property originally donated by wealthy patrons and devotees. Often these donations were land grants or gold. The land grants endowed temples with huge estates which they rented out for cultivation to tenants. The gold was usually lent out for interest. Despite public contribution to the upkeep of temples these were managed and administered solely by a Brahmin body called *ur*, or *sabha*.

Every Brahmin village settlement had its own *sabhai*. In theory, the *ur/sabha* consisted of all Brahmin members of these settlements. In practice, however, the meetings of *ur/sabha* were attended by heads of property-owning Brahmin households.

*Ur/Sabha* was a “general body of village administration”. The members were also known as *ur*, *urar* and *uralar*. These terms were used interchangeably to mean village, village residents and owners of the village. They had an executive council

known as *paratai* or *parishad* to carry out the resolutions of the *uralars*. *Paratai* carried out the day-to-day affairs of the temple management. Its members were known as *parataiyar*. The membership to *paratai* was restricted to property-owning Brahmins from the *sabha* who were versed in Vedic education.

It administered the affairs of Brahmin village settlements, its temples, managed temple property, settled disputes among its members and between landlords and tenants and collected and paid revenue accrued on *devaswom* property that was due to the royal treasury. It was they who rented out temple lands and leased out gold. The lands that belonged to temples were leased out to tenants called *karalar* by the *uralars*. The tenants cultivated the land using landless labourers called *atiyals* who were more like slaves than employees.

The *uralars* paid the king *rakshabhogam*, or tribute in lieu of the security he provided. The collective revenue due on the temple land was paid by the *uralars* who paid their individual shares known as *katamai*, or obligation. Although it was *uralars* who paid their share of *katamai*, it was not unknown for *karalars* to pay the share of their landlords. The *Uralars* operated as a corporate body with the interests and well-being of the Brahmin community at heart. The conduct of these councils was governed by a common code of conduct known as *Muzhikkulam Kachcham*. It detailed the rights and obligations of *sabha* members.

It can be inferred from inscriptions that the code was strictly enforced on pain of penalty. Sources tell us that *sabha* could excommunicate its erring members and even expropriate them for financial wrongs. *Muzhikkulam Kachcham* was a *vyavastha* prepared along the lines of *Dharmashastra*.

The *sabha* adopted its resolutions unanimously. The model of consensus prevailed and it is an indication of the corporate character of the body. Its exact mechanism is unknown but inscriptions speak of royal representatives such as military commanders who were present at these meetings. It is probable that as kings' men they persuaded the members to forego their differences and agree upon a common decision. Thus, the structure of land organisation and administration under Perumals was also three-tiered. In the first tier there was over-lordship of the king called *koyinmai*; in the second tier was the actual ownership of villages by Brahmins called *uranmai*, and the third tier in the hierarchy was manned by *karalars*, the tenants whose set of rights was known as *karanmai*.

Veluthat has called these bodies "oligarchic caste corporations of a feudal character."

The main difference between *brahmaswam* and *devaswam* was that the former was owned and managed by individual families while the latter was managed and administered collectively by the Brahmin body called *Ur*, or *Sabha*.

## Recap

- ◆ There were thirty-two Brahmin settlements in Kerala.
- ◆ Aryanisation and Brahmanisation shaped Kerala's culture.
- ◆ Kadambas, Chalukyas, Pallavas promoted Brahmin immigration.
- ◆ Southern kings granted land to Brahmins.
- ◆ Brahmins became landlords by the ninth century.
- ◆ Brahmins settled near rivers for agriculture control.
- ◆ Brahmins influenced the rise of Perumals.
- ◆ Local rulers allied with Brahmin settlers.
- ◆ Brahmins controlled temple administration through *Sabha*.
- ◆ Brahmin lands were known as *Brahmaswam*.
- ◆ Brahmins also controlled *Devaswom* (temple property).
- ◆ The Brahmin code was *Muzhikkulam Kachcham*.

## Objective Questions

1. When did Brahmin immigration to the south start?
2. From which part of the Indian subcontinent did Brahmins immigrate?
3. How many original settlements did Brahmins found in Kerala?
4. Which two historical processes influenced Kerala history in the first millennium C.E.?
5. Which southern dynasties patronised Brahmin immigration in south India?
6. Why were Brahmin settlements found along river banks?

7. What was the primary impact of Brahmin settlements on the economy?
8. What is the Sanskrit word for the four-fold varna system?
9. Why did local rulers strike up an alliance with Brahmin settlers? State one reason.
10. What *varna* status did Brahmins accord the local rulers?
11. What is *Brahmaswam*?
12. What was the term for the form of land tenure that Brahmins enjoyed?
13. What is the meaning of *Devaswom*?
14. How did temples acquire a great amount of wealth?
15. What was the general body of village administration called?

## Answers

1. Third century C.E.
2. Northern India
3. Thirty-two
4. Aryanisation and Brahmanisation
5. Kadambas, Chalukyas, Pallavas
6. To control paddy cultivation
7. Agriculture
8. *Chaturvarnya*
9. Brahmins controlled agriculture
10. Kshatriya
11. Brahmin's property
12. *Janmam*

13. Temple's property

14. Via donations

15. *Sabha* (or Ur)

## Assignments

1. Analyse the reasons behind Brahmin settlements along riverbanks and their significance in agricultural control.
2. Explain the role of Brahmins in the rise of the Perumals of Makotai.
3. Compare and contrast *Brahmaswam* and *Devaswom* in terms of ownership and administration.
4. Describe the hierarchical land tenure system under the Perumals and its implications for society.

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## Craftwork and Trade

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ identify the emergence of new socio-economic groups in Kerala and their impact on traditional structures
- ◆ analyse the key factors driving social transformation in Kerala and their implications for the state's cultural and economic landscape
- ◆ evaluate the role of scientific and technological advancements in shaping Kerala's socio-economic development

### Prerequisites

During the three centuries of Perumal rule, Kerala society experienced significant transformations. These changes profoundly impacted lives across the region, leading to the emergence of new social groups, trade guilds, castes, and sub-castes that would shape Kerala's future. Transitioning from a semi-tribal state, Kerala entered a new stage of civilisation characterised by a more complex division of labor and social hierarchy. The Brahmins played a crucial role in this transformative process. Their presence in Kerala dictated to a huge extent the pattern of this social transformation. They helped to create around them administrative and occupational groups who became castes and sub castes in later periods. Some of the new social groups were Kshatriyas, Samantas, Ambalavasis and Nairs.

### Keywords

Trade Guilds, Castes, Division of Labour, Social Transformations, *Laghubbhaskariyavyakhyā*

## Discussion

### 4.5.1 *Ainkudi Kammalars*

The creation of new social groups did not stop at the top. It percolated the bottom of the society where it created new castes and subcastes. All these new groups accepted the superiority of Brahmins, the state, and were integrated into the new emerging social order based on *chaturvarnya* and caste system. As occupational groups the new castes and sub-castes served the elites. Most of these artisanal castes were engaged in some kind of skilled work. One of the important artisanal groups was *Ainkudi Kammalars*.

Two of the artisan caste groups that emerged in the early medieval period were *Kammalars* and *Vellalars*. *Kammalars* were castes of artisans who specialised in various but interrelated fields. According

to inscriptions there were five *Kammalar* castes. They were *Tachchan*, or carpenter; *Musari*, or bronze smith, *Thattan*, or goldsmith, *Kollan*, or blacksmith, and *Karuvan*, or potter.

These were five occupational groups who made various objects of utility from farm tools to architectural equipment. As the sub-castes of *Kammalars* they intermarried. They formed a crucial link in the Brahmin-led economy of Kerala.

*Vellalars* were another caste group who were engaged in weaving, trading and agricultural labour. There were four subdivisions within them. These were *Saiva Vellalas*, *Tenkasi Vellalas*, *Nanjinad Vellalas* and *Chenkul Vellalas*. They are believed to have migrated from the interior of Tamilnadu and settled in Kerala.



Fig 4.5.1 Vellalars worshiping deities (1909)

#### 4.5.2 Jewish and Christian Trading Corporations

Natives were not the only trading guilds and corporations. Throughout its history Kerala has had a thriving maritime trade relation with the rest of the world. Romans, Greeks, Phoenicians, Chinese and Arabs were major trading partners of Kerala. The trade conferred many benefits to Kerala. On the other hand, it brought revenue to the state and profit for the traders. It established crucial economic and cultural links with West Asia, Mediterranean and South East Asia. The fame of the land attracted people from west Asia who immigrated to Kerala, settled down and formed new communities.

Chief among the settler communities were Jews, Christians and Muslims. But, in the period under review only Jews and Christians had settled down in Kerala. The “West Asian colonists,” as MGS Narayanan has called them, arrived and settled in Kerala in the first millennium C.E. Historians are yet to discover concrete evidence that could shed light on the questions of when, why and how these communities reached the shores of Kerala. These communities also had stories

regarding their beginnings in Kerala. The most notable among these are the story of the origin of the Syrian Christians. The Syrian Christians claim that they were ex-Brahmins who were converted to Christianity by St. Thomas himself. While the veracity of this story is debated, Syrian Christians had been an established community by the ninth century C.E.

The copper plate inscriptions tell us about the grants and privileges which the governor of Venad gave to Mar Sapir Iso, the leader of Syrian Christians. He was granted trading rights and invested with the seventy-two privileges of aristocracy. It is believed that the trading corporation (*nagaram*) of Kollam was founded by him. The settlement of manigramam was made the tenants of Kollam. The church of Tarissappalli at Kollam also received the three charters from the governor along with lands and serfs.

The Jews were the other West Asian colonists who settled in Kerala and had become established by the ninth century C.E. The Cochin copper plate inscriptions record the charter from Perumal Bhaskara Ravi to Joseph Rabban of Muyirikkode (*Kodungalloor*). He was also given the



Fig 4.5.2 Jewish Copper Plates of Cochin c. 1000 C.E

seventy-two privileges of aristocracy. The Jewish settlement of *Anchuvannam* was exempted from taxes, its protection put under the captains of Hundred Organisations who were to act according to the captains of *Anchuvannam*.

The status of *Manigramam* and *Anchuvannam* was debated among historians. While previous historians had stated that these were simply trading settlements with no particular religious affiliation, MGS Narayanan has argued that *Manigramam* and *Anchuvannam* were Christian and Jewish trading settlements respectively. He has stated that the leaders of these settlements permitted people from other castes and communities to settle down in connection with their labour requirements.

In MGS analysis, these settlements were semi-autonomous local units where the respective communities had extensive rights and privileges even in matters of law and order. The leaders of these communities (*talaiyars*) were treated as the rulers of their communities, and as representatives they represented their communities in the rulers' assembly.

Although Christians and Jews were migrants, they won the trust and confidence

of the rulers and the local population. In time they adopted the customs and manners of their adopted home and developed a highly syncretic culture. The native rulers and kings tolerated and later patronised them generously as they brought a significant amount of trade and revenue into their territory. The story of royal patronage and local support to West Asian colonists continued to mark the history of Kerala as seen in Zamorin's patronage of Arab Muslim traders, or the Cochin kings' patronage and support to Europeans such as the Portuguese and the Dutch.

#### 4.5.3 Scientific and Technological Advancements

It is a common theme in world history, the rise of arts, literature and culture in an age of political ascendancy. Although Perumals exercised only nominal, ritual authority, they were nonetheless the sovereigns of Kerala. Under the Perumals, Kerala experienced political and social stability during the ninth and tenth centuries. It contributed significantly to the advancement of culture in Kerala.

The arts, literature and culture received royal and aristocratic patronage.



Fig 4.5.3 Jewish couple in Kerala pictured in Portuguese Codice Casanatense 16<sup>th</sup> century

The diverse fields of culture such as architecture, language, literature and philosophy produced new works that would help shape the future of Kerala culture.

Astronomy was another field which registered tremendous progress. MGS Narayanan has said that the popularity of the science could be gauged from references to astral positions in inscriptions and epigraphs. Whether or not it indicates the popularity of astronomy, it is definitely a sign of astronomy's significance in royal and aristocratic circles. Further, it was important in marking time, especially momentous occasions such as coronation etc.

One of the main literary sources of Perumal period is the astronomical treatise called *Laghubhaskariyavyakhya*. Composed in 870 C.E. by court astronomer Sankaranarayana it has incidental references to many historical episodes such as the military campaign under prince Ramadeva, the birth of a son to king Ravivarmadeva and descriptions about Mahodayapuram. The work also indicates Sthanu Ravi's support to astronomy and describes astronomical devices such as *rasichakra* marked by *yantravakya* that

was installed in Mahodayapuram, the capital city.

As a scientific work, *Laghubhaskariyavyakhya* is a commentary on Bhaskara's *Laghubhaskariya* (524 C.E.). Bhaskara's *Laghubhaskariya* itself was a commentary and simplification of Aryabhatta's work, *Aryabhatiya* (499 C.E.). The subject of Sankaranarayana's work was on the calculation and determination of planets' position using the methodology of Aryabhata.

The author has given the date of composition in both Saka and Kali eras. He has also given the regnal year of the then reigning Perumal, Sthanu Ravi Kulasekara. However, he has not given the date in the Kollam era. It means that the Kollam settlement had not yet been established since the Kollam era is dated from its founding.

During his exposition, Sankaranarayana said he used the system of *Paithyarastra*. Thus, he revealed the training he received in Chalukyan city. It is also significant because it signifies the cross-cultural contacts from the north of Kerala that influenced the literary and intellectual culture in Kerala.

## Recap

- ◆ *Ainkudi Kammalars*: Five artisanal castes, integrated into social order.
- ◆ *Kammalars and Vellalars*: Artisan and agricultural labor caste groups.
- ◆ Jews and Christians settled in Kerala, first millennium.
- ◆ Syrian Christians, Jews received privileges, trading rights from rulers.
- ◆ Jewish, Christian settlements had semi-autonomous, significant privileges.

- ◆ Migrant communities adopted local customs, syncretic culture.
- ◆ Perumal period: political stability, cultural advancements in Kerala.
- ◆ Sankaranarayana's treatise: astronomy, historical references, cross-cultural influences.

## Objective Questions

1. Who authored *Laghubbhakariyavyakhya*?
2. Who is the Perumal mentioned in *Laghubbhaskariya Vyakhya*?
3. Name some castes that emerged during the first two centuries of Perumal rule.
4. Who were *Ainkudi Kammalars*?
5. List the five sub-castes of the *Kammalar* community.
6. What were the occupations of the five *Kammalar* sub-castes?
7. Who were *Vellalars*?
8. What did MGS Narayanan call Jews and Christians who migrated to Kerala?
9. Which community is associated with the St. Thomas legend?
10. Who was the Christian leader who was made an aristocrat?

## Answers

1. Sankaranarayana
2. Sthanu Ravi Kulasekhara
3. Kshatriyas, Samanths, Nairs, Ampalavasis, Kammalars, and Vellalars
4. A caste of artisans
5. Tachchan, Musari, Thattan, Kollan, and Karuvan

6. Carpenter, Bronzesmith, Goldsmith, Blacksmith, and Potter
7. A caste of farmers, weavers, and traders
8. West Asian Colonists
9. Syrian Christians
10. Mar Sapir Iso

## Assignments

1. How did maritime trade affect Kerala's relationships with trading partners like Romans, Greeks, Phoenicians, Chinese, and Arabs? What were the benefits and challenges of these interactions?
2. Explain the idea of semi-autonomous local units for Jewish and Christian settlements in Kerala. How did these units operate within the local government and society?
3. Analyse the significance of *Laghubhaskariyavyakhya* in the context of Kerala's scientific and technological advancements during the Perumal period. What does the work reveal about cross-cultural influences in Kerala?

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# Medieval Swaroopams



# Naduvazhi Swaroopam

## UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ understand and explain the theories and causes that contributed to the decline of the Perumal rule.
- ◆ trace the process that led to the emergence of Swaroopam after the fall of the Chera dynasty.
- ◆ identify and describe the key Swaroopams of the period.
- ◆ gain insight into the political dynamics and cultural environment of the time.

### Prerequisites

The Perumals of Mahodayapuram emerged as a significant political force in South India within a Brahmin-dominated agrarian society. This period saw the rise of distinct features in Kerala's social structure, including the formation of the caste system, the practice of matriliney, the development of the Malayalam language, the establishment of temples, and the feudal nature of society.

The political landscape also experienced shifts following the decline of the Chera rulers. Historians suggest that the collapse of the Chera dynasty gave rise to a new political order centered around the major *nadus* (territories), allowing these regions to assert their independence. The political significance of Swaroopams grew as a result of these changes.

## Keywords

Perumal, Naduvazhis, Swaroopam, Matrilineal, Keralolpathi, Kolathunadu, Perumals, Trippapur Swaroopam, Perumapadappu Swaroopam, Nediyiripu Swaroopam, Kolathunadu.

## Discussion

### 5.1.1 Decline of Perumal and Rise of Swaroopams

It has been found that the Perumal line of rulers came to a sudden end in the first quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century under strange circumstances. This question remains a mystery giving scope for speculation among historians. It is deemed necessary to examine some of the central arguments of scholars regarding the end of the Perumal rule.

- ◆ According to Elamkulam, the 'Hundred Year War' between Cholas and Cheras caused the dynasty's eclipse. M.G.S. Narayanan has contested this view. According to him, there was no prolonged war, though Cheras faced a threat from Cholas. However, there were recurrent wars between them.
- ◆ According to *Keralolpathi*, the last Chera ruler partitioned his kingdom among his feudatories, which resulted in the disappearance of the central power. The kingdom was partitioned into seventeen principalities. M.G.S. Narayanan argued that the eighteen provinces (seventeen principalities and Tulunadu) of the kingdom started to form independent principalities following the disappearance of the central power.
- ◆ The traditional chronicle,

*Keralolpathi*, also stated that the last Perumal ordered the killing of the commander of armed force, *patamel nayar*, based on 'woman's words. This act made him guilty, which led him to convert to Islam and abdicate his kingdom. He divided the kingdom among the chiefs, became a convert to Islam and left to Mecca on pilgrimage.

- ◆ According to P. K. Gopalakrishnan, the administrative weakness of the kingdom after the reign of Kulasekhara Alwar (c. 800-820 AD) is one of the causes of the collapse of the kingdom. The administrative weakness helped the *naduvazhis* to declare their independence.
- ◆ According to M. G. S Narayanan, the conspiracies and plotting against the state by the Brahmin leaders and the Nair fighting class could be a reason for the disappearance of the empire. The prolonged war with the Chola Empire forced the 'emperor' to rely on foreign merchants for military assistance. This dependency could have displeased the Brahmin orthodoxy and Nair's. It must have created opportunities for conspiracy on the crisis of the state like depletion of the central treasury, non-collection of

revenue, neglect of all religious and administrative works and the general weakening of the old political framework.

What happened after the disappearance of the Perumals is another crucial question to be examined. During the last phase of Chera rule, the Brahmins and *naduvazhis* gradually asserted their authority. Let us examine various views of historians regarding the *naduvazhis*. Sreedhara Menon argues that *naduvazhis* were the chieftains of the *nadu*. K. N. Ganesh opined that the new *naduvazhis* were the powerful landlords of the area controlling the vast areas of *Cherikkal* land.

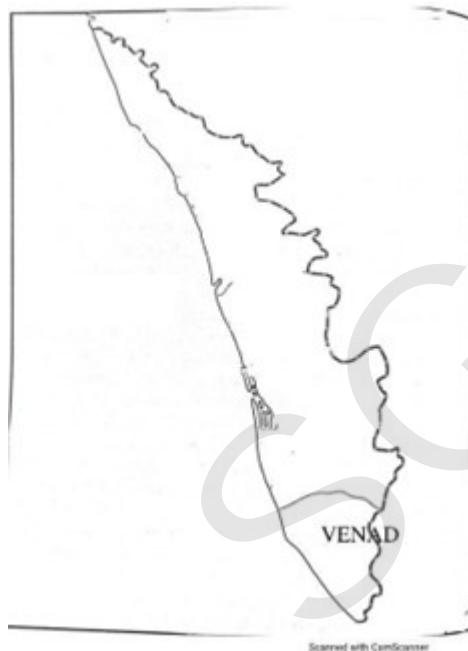


Fig 5.1.1 Venad

Some social changes came about with the emergence of *naduvazhis*. According to historians like K.N. Ganesh and M. G. S. Narayanan, the Chera rulers could not control the dominance of the *naduvazhis* during their last phase. The last phase is also marked by the expansion of Brahmin settlements and the evolution of temples around the agrarian tracts. The overlordship of *naduvazhis* was supported with the help of Brahmins and temples.

Therefore, K. N. Ganesh opined that after the disappearance of the Cheras, a new social order with feudal elements began to appear on the scene.

Eventually, the *naduvazhis* asserted their independence with the end of the Perumal rule. According to K. N. Ganesh, the close relationship between *naduvazhis*, Brahmins, and temples helped the *naduvazhis* assert their independence. The close relationship among them led to crucial political changes in medieval society. The significant change was the emergence of *Swaroopams*.

What is the relation between *Swaroopam* and *naduvazhis*? The *Naduvazhis* were known by the locality where the family belonged. The original family root of the *naduvazhi* is the *Swaroopam*. Hence, *Swaroopam* can be defined as the ruling family of the *naduvazhis*.

Some of the *Swaroopam* families became more powerful on the political scene in the post-Chera period and eventually emerged as a kingdom in the medieval period. Some of the prominent *Swaroopams* were *Trippapur Swaroopam* (Venad), *Perumabadappu Swaroopam* (Kochi), *Nediyirippu Swaroopam* (Kozhikode), and *Kolathunadu*.

## 5.1.2 Venad, Kochi, Kozhikode and Kolathunadu

### 5.1.2.1 Trippapur Swaroopam (Venad)

Venad or *Trippapur Swaroopam* emerged as an independent kingdom after the disappearance of the Cheras of Mahodayapuram. During the Perumal period, Venad was the prominent southern province of the Chera Empire. The Venad emerged as a still imposing political entity

during the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Shangoonny Menon tried to reflect the antiquity of Venad by discussing the genealogy of the rulers. According to Shangoonny Menon, Venad rulers ruled their territory from the fourth to the eighth century.

Initially, Kilperur was the main centre of the *Venad Swaroopam*. Later, the family of Ay chiefs, residing at Trippappur and Chiravi, merged with the Venad family. The amalgamation created the three lineages of the Venad family; Trippappur, Desinganadu and Chiravi. The eldest male member of the family served as the Chief of the Venad Swaroopam and was called *Chiravi Muppan*.

We find some early references to the naduvazhis of Venad in the epigraphical sources of the Chera period. These include the Tarisappally Copper Plate of Ayyan Adikal Tiruvadikal (c. 849), Mampally Plate of Vallabhan Kotha (c.974 CE) and Trikkodithanam temple inscription Govardhana Marthanda (c.976 CE).

**Rulers of Venad and their Genealogy:** An overview of the chiefs and contributions to society is attempted. The names of chiefs until the 11<sup>th</sup> century have remained obscure. However, we can say that Venad emerged as an independent political entity under the Ramavarma Kulasekhara (c. 1090-1102). The history of Ramavarma Kulasekhara is covered in mystery. The historian often depicts him as the ‘founder of the Venad royal house’. Ramavarma Kulasekhara assumed the titles like *Kulasekhara* or *Kulasekhara Perumal* to show their lineage with the Cheras of Mahodayapuram.

Ravi Varma Kulasekhara (c.1299-1314) was the next prominent ruler of the early Venad. He assumed the title *Sangramadhira*. He is credited with

constructing the Venad Swaroopam as a military state. Ravi Varma Kulasekhara patronised poets like Samudrabandha and Kavibhushana. Ravi Varma Kulasekhara composed the Sanskrit drama, *Pradyumnabhyudayam*.

The period of the later Venad rulers marked a new epoch in Kerala history. From 1314 to 1729, the onset of European powers and their trading activities interrupted the chiefdom.

### 5.1.2.2 Perumbadappu Swaroopam (Kochi)

The emergence of Perumbadappu Swaroopam, often referred to as the ‘Kochi kingdom’, into Kerala’s political scene was conspicuous after the arrival of the Portuguese.

The *Swaroopam* had its base at Chitrakutam in Vanneri (Ponnani, Malappuram). Mahodayapuram was the capital of Perumbadappu Swaroopam. The shift in capital from Vanneri to Mahodayapuram (Kodungallur) occurred after the attack of Zamorin. During this period, the flood of 1314 forced the Chief of Kochi to shift their capital to Cochin when they realised that Kochi could attain economic development through the port of Cochin.

The Cochin State Manual states that the *Swaroopam* had its origin in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. However, this claim cannot be substantiated with concrete evidence. The details of genealogy and the early history of the Perumbadappu Swaroopam from the 14<sup>th</sup> century are available in literary works such as *Sukasandesam*, *Unniadicharitam*, *Sivavilasam* and *Vitanidrabhanam*. Foreign travellers like Fei Hsien and Ma Huan had referred to Cochin in their accounts.

According to *Sivavilasam* by Damodara Chakyar, the Chief of the *Swaroopam* was called *Kerala Chakravarti*. Other names include *Perumbadappu Gangadhara Virakerala Trikkovil Adhikari*. However, the ruler of Kochi is popularly called *Koyiladhikari*. The Vira Raghava Pattayam of Perumbadappu chief Vira Raghava was considered the earliest epigraphic evidence of Perumbadappu rulers. A much clear source about the Perumbadappu rulers is evident after the arrival of the Portuguese.

### 5.1.2.3 Kolathunadu

The origin of Kolathunadu is not known. Historians have information about this *Swaroopam* from Sanskrit work like *Mushakavamsa Kavya* of Atula, foreign records of Al-Beruni, Marco-Polo, Abul Fida and others. The sources of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, including *Kerala Mahatmyam* and *Keralolpathi*, suggest that Mushaka country came to be known as Kolathunadu. Kolathunadu extends from Korapuzha in the South to Kasaragod in the north.



Fig 5.1.1 Kolathunadu

The rulers of the nadu were *Kolathiris*. The four other male members of the *thavazhi* had the titles *Tekkelamkur*, *Vadakkelamkur*, *Nalamkur* and *Anchamkur*. The *Kolathiri* gave these four individual responsibilities. *Tekkelamkur* and *Vadakkelamkur* administered the southern and northern regions. The *Nalamkur* was the manager of the household of *Kolathiri*, and *Anchamkur* was his attendant.

Historians made the genealogy and chronology of the Kolathunadu chiefs from indigenous literary works. Accordingly, it was assumed that Raghavan was one of the early rulers of Kolathunadu. He patronised poets like Raghavananda, Divakara, Raghava and Sankara. He made his nephew, Rama Varma, compose '*Bharata Sangraha*'.

*Kolathiris* were tolerant towards European traders, welcomed the Portuguese, Dutch and English traders to their place, and granted permission to engage in trading activities within their territories. Their constant struggle with the Portuguese and Zamorins increased internal weakness in the kingdom. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the *Kolathiris* faced attacks from Karnataka, Mysore rulers and the British. *Kolathiris* eventually accepted the suzerainty of the British, and the rulers were pensioned off.

### 5.1.2.4 Nediyirippu Swaroopam (Kozhikode)

Zamorins emerged as the ruler of Kozhikode from Nediyirippu Swaroopam. It is believed that they were the descendants of Eranadu. Hence, the Jewish records call them 'Eranadu Udayavar'. He is also referred to as Nediyirippu Mooppan. The Zamorins then assumed the title "Swami Nambiyathiri Tirumulpadu", which was shortened to *Samutiri*. He also

assumed epithets like *Kunnala konatiri*, *Sailabdhiswaran* and *Punturakon* to show his royalty over the port city of Calicut.

**Zamorins and their Significant Conquests:** We have heard several stories regarding the conquest and valour of Zamorins. The Zamorin acquired the governorship of vast areas through a series of conquests.

**Conquest of Polanad:** The first major conquest was Polanad. Zamorin's significant achievement was the capture of Calicut. The main aim of this conquest was to get an outlet to the sea and make a profit through overseas trade. The war ended with the victory of Eradis. The *Porlatiris* were then forced to flee to Kolathunadu for asylum. The war resulted in the shift in the capital of Eradis from Nediyiruppu to Calicut. The capture of Calicut helped Zamorin to lead his further movement of expansion. Therefore, after Polanad, the chiefs of Beypore, Parappangad and Vellat accepted his suzerainty.

**The Conquest of Valluvanad:** The Zamorin then turned his attention to conquering Valluvanad for various reasons. His immediate attention was to conquer Thirunavaya, mainly to preside over the *Mamamkam* festival. The other reason includes controlling the fertile tract of Valluvanad and the port of Ponnani. Valluvanad was defeated in the war and attained the position of *Rakshapurusha* or 'Protector of Mamamkam.'

**Zamorins and Perumbadappu Swaroopam:** Zamorins could not attack Kochi initially due to the adverse climate. Then how did they proceed with their conquest? Zamorins utilised the internal conflict within the *Perumbadappu thavazhi* to interfere in internal matters. Gradually, Zamorin defeated the ruler and occupied the fort at Thrissur. Zamorin then made *mutha thavazhi* prince the ruler of Kochi.

He accepted the Zamorin's suzerainty and agreed to pay an annual tribute to supply regular delegations to the Zamorin army and sell his pepper and other merchandise through Calicut port.

**Battle against Palghat Chief, Kolathunadu and the Europeans:** After Kochi, Zamorin turned his attention against the ruler of Palghat and conquered Naduvattam. The Kolathunadu chief also accepted the sovereignty of Zamorins by the 15<sup>th</sup> century. By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Zamorin became the overlord of the majority area of Kerala. However, Zamorin faced a series of struggles against Portuguese, Dutch and British imperialism.

### 5.1.3 Nature of Swaroopam Polity

It has been pointed out that many independent kingdoms emerged in Kerala after the disappearance of the Perumal kingdom. Among the principalities, Venad, Kochi, Kolathunadu and Kozhikode were the prominent ones. The references to the existence of Swaroopams are available from the records of the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century. According to K. N. Ganesh, the growth of *Swaroopam* was the outcome of the changes in the medieval settlement pattern following the expansion of the agrarian economy.

K.N. Ganesh has made insightful inferences on the evolution of medieval *Swaroopam*, which can be summed as follows.

- a. *Swaroopams* formed the base of *nattudayavar (naduvazhis)*.
- b. *Swaroopams* emerged as a tool for political ascendancy. The point had been elaborated, citing that *Swaroopams* had several followers called *akambadajanam*, who supported their dominance in the *nadu*.

- c. Brahmin dominance and temple *melkoyma* helped the *Swaroopam* to establish their authority.
- d. The growth of new agrarian communities and their settlements have also given birth to *Swaroopams*. For example, Poonjar Swaroopam.
- e. *Swaroopams* can also be seen dominating new territories with the help of their people. For example, the migration of Perumbadappu Swaroopam from Vanneri to Kochi.

**Swaroopams:** *Swaroopams* were the ruling families that controlled the *Naduvazhis*. Some of the other definitions proposed by various historians are given below.

In the words of M.G. S. Narayanan, *Swaroopams* were conceived as a 'dynasty' with a certain unwritten code of conduct (*mariyada*) and convention (*acharam*) to safeguard the boundary of their separate territory.

According to Raghava Varier, *Swaroopam* was the family of chieftains that ruled the *nadu* after the Chera period. V V Haridas, however, translated *Swaroopam* as 'the house'. S Raju has maintained that the concept of *Swaroopam* is defined by itself as a 'self-form' or 'self-formed' or 'self-forming' or 'having one's form'. The word *Swaroopam* simultaneously implied its relational and exclusive existence. He further argues that *Swaroopam* simultaneously denotes a territorial spread and the most distinguished family of the *muppu*. Several *Swaroopam* co-existed with *nadukal*.

The medieval texts like *Keralolpathi Granthavari*, *Perumbadappu Granthavari* and *Kozhikodan Granthavari* suggest that *Swaroopams* means influential family and not a 'royal family'.

### Characteristics of Swaroopam :

The most common characteristic of *Swaroopam* was the nature of kinship, which means that they followed the *marumakkathayam* or matrilineal system of inheritance. In this system, the heir of the *Swaroopams* was traced through their mother's line.

The *Swaroopams* or royal families comprise *thavazhis* or collateral branches. Sreedhara Menon defined *thavazhis* as 'the branch of a matriarchal family. The *thavazhi* set the pattern of succession as the Chief of *Swaroopam*. The position was based on the seniority of the members in the different *thavazhis* of the *Swaroopam*. For example, in the case of Perumbadappu Swaroopam, there are five *thavazhis*. Among these *thavazhis*, the senior-most male member will become the Perumbadappil Valiya Thampuran.

Inheritance to the position of the Chief was ensured through the custom of *kuruvazhcha*. The senior male member of the *thavazhi* is given priority to succeed in the position of the Chief. Therefore, the progression pattern is based on *kuruvazcha* or *Muppu mura*.

The *Muthakur*, or eldest person, became the Chief of the *Swaroopam* and was known by different titles. For instance, the eldest male member of Venad, called *Vennattai*, of Kochi is *Mutha koyil*; in Kolathunadu, he was known as *kolathiri* and *Zamorin* in the case of Kozhikode. The rest younger male members were termed as *Ilamkur*.

The coronation ceremony of the senior member of the *Swaroopam* family is called *Ariyittuvazhcha*. The *Swaroopam* enjoyed hereditary political and judicial authority over their territory. Each *Swaroopams* maintained its militia, called *Ayirathavar*, *Pathinayirathavar* and *Patamala Nair*.

## Recap

- ◆ Elamkulam: The Chera rule ended due to prolonged war.
- ◆ War weakened central administration.
- ◆ Differing opinions on Chera eclipse.
- ◆ Naduvazhis' growing power contributed to downfall.
- ◆ Swaroopams: ruling families controlling political affairs.
- ◆ Swaroopams followed a matrilineal inheritance system.
- ◆ The *Kuruvazhcha* system chose Swaroopam Chiefs.
- ◆ Zamorins became *Mamamkam's Rakshapurusha* from Valluvandu.
- ◆ Kilperur was Venad's main center.
- ◆ Perumbadappu Swaroopam was based in Venneri.
- ◆ Perumbadappu capital moved to Mahodayapuram.
- ◆ Mushaka country known as Kolathunadu.
- ◆ Kolathunadu ruler titled Kolathiri.
- ◆ Zamorins ruled Nediyirippu Swaroopam.
- ◆ Jewish records: Zamorins called 'Eranadu Udayavar'.

## Objective Questions

1. Who forwarded the theory that the 'Hundred Year War' led to the disappearance of Chera rule?
2. Which text said that Kulasekhara Alwar embraced Islam and went to Mecca?
3. Who was a *naduvazhi*?
4. What was the inheritance pattern followed by Swaroopams?
5. Which ruler issued the Tarisappally copper plate?
6. Which Venad ruler assumed the title, *Kulasekhara Perumal*?
7. Which Venad ruler is called *Sangramadhira*?
8. Which was the place of origin of Perumbadappu Swaroopam?
9. What caused the shift of capital of Perumbadappu Swaroopam to Kochi?

10. Which primary sources throw light on the history of Perumbadappu Swaroopam?
11. Which were the epithets assumed by Perumbadappu chiefs?
12. Who was called *Koyiladhikari*?
13. Which Swaroopam was ruled by Kolathiris?
14. What was the initial epithet of Zamorins?
15. What was the name of the eldest Chief of Swaroopam?
16. What was name of the coronation ceremony of the Swaroopam family?

## Answers

1. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai
2. *Keralolpathi*
3. Chieftains of *nadu*
4. Matrilineal system of inheritance
5. Ayyan Adikal Tiruvadikal
6. Ramavarma Kulasekhara
7. Ravi Varma Kulasekhara
8. Chitrakutam in Venneri
9. Threat from Zamorin
10. *Sukasandesam*, *Unniadicharitam*, *Sivavilasam* and *Vitanidrabhanam*.
11. *Kerala Chakravarti*, *Perumbadappu Gangadhara Virakerala Trikkovil Adhikari*, *Koyiladhikari*.
12. Chief of Kochi
13. Kolathunadu
14. Eranadu Udayavar
15. *Muthakur*
16. *Ariyittuvazhcha*

## Assignments

1. Analyse M.G.S. Narayanan's factors for the disappearance of the Chera Empire. What role did internal conspiracies and external dependencies play in its decline?
2. Explain the relationship between Swaroopams and Naduvazhis in medieval Kerala. How did the rise of Swaroopams impact the political landscape?
3. Compare the political entities that emerged after the fall of the Chera Empire. How did each region establish its independence and political authority?

## Suggested Reading

1. Ganesh, K. N., *Keralathinte Innalakal*, Kerala Bhasha Institute, Trivandrum, 2018.
2. Gopalakrishnan, P. K., *Keralathinte Samskarika Charitram*, Kerala Bhasha Institute, Trivandrum, 2019.

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1. Gurukkal, Rajan, and Raghava Varier, *History of Kerala: Prehistoric to the Present*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2018.
2. Haridas, V. V., *Zamorins and the Political Culture of Medieval Kerala*, Orient Black Swan, 2016.
3. Menon, A. Sreedhara, *A Survey of Kerala History*, DC Books, Kottayam, 2019.
4. Narayanan, M. G. S., *Perumals of Kerala*, Cosmo Books, Thrissur, 2013.



## Source Materials

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ identify key source materials related to Medieval Kerala.
- ◆ understand the evolution of the Malayalam language.
- ◆ recognise the importance of native sources like Granthavari and Manipravalam literature, as well as foreign travel accounts from Arabs, Chinese, and Europeans.

### Prerequisites

Kerala's history is often told through legendary stories about its origins and political events. As history students, how can we use these stories to reconstruct the past? Why are sources important? Sources shed light on past events, helping us understand the complex society, economic activities, and political structures of the period. Historians use these sources to create an objective account of history. This unit explores the relevant sources of Medieval Kerala, ranging from indigenous texts to foreign accounts.

### Keywords

*Granthavari, Manipravalam Literature, Bhasha Kautilya, Attaprakaram, Kramadipika.*

### Discussion

**Evolution of the Malayalam Language :** Before discussing the details of *Granthavari* and *Manipravalam* works, it is necessary to look into the background of the evolution of Malayalam as a language. The origin of Malayalam can be traced back to the early 9<sup>th</sup> century.

There are some theories regarding the origin of Malayalam. One theory states that Malayalam has evolved from Sanskrit and Prakrit. Robert Caldwell critiqued this theory and tried to connect Tamil and Malayalam. He argues that the earlier form of Malayalam was an offshoot of Tamil. Herman Gundert, Goda Varma and Ullur insist that Malayalam is a sister language of Tamil. M. G. S observed that a new dialect might have occurred before the rise of Cheras. He opined that the new Malayalam forms were found frequently in the earliest epigraphic records of Cheras. Malayalam and Tamil as separate languages developed gradually.

### 5.2.1 *Granthavari*

*Granthavari* is a document that deals with the land transactions and contemporary events related to temples and royal households. The rulers of the medieval period found it necessary to codify land transactions and other matters related to the temple. The codification process, in a way, resulted at the beginning of a tradition that relied on written sources rather than oral evidence.

Each of the Swaroopams maintained its *Granthavaris*. Some of the important *Granthavaris* that historians have used are *Mathilakam Granthavari*, *Perumbadappu Granthavari* (Kochi), *Kozhikodan Grantha-varи* (Zamorins) and *Koodali Granthavari*.

*Mathilakam Granthavari* is a vast collection of records related to the Padmanabhaswamy temple, Thiruvananthapuram. This record clearly explains the various rituals in the huge Padmanabha Swamy temple and the resources for the temple's affairs.

The *Granthavari* tradition continued until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, with the influence of British colonial history

writing, the tradition of *Granthavari* received a setback. Even in the declining phase, the *Granthavari* tradition was widely used for tracing the history of 18<sup>th</sup> century Kerala. One of the best examples is the work *Tiruvitamkur Charitam* by Vaikathu Pachu Moothathu, which refused to part with the narrative tradition of the *Granthavari*.

### 5.2.2 *Manipravalam* Literature

During the 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, a new literary language named *Manipravalam* developed in Kerala. This literature is a mix of Malayalam, Sanskrit and Tamil. Most *Manipravalam* works were written in *Grantha* script.

Tolan produced the first literature of this kind. Few verses in his work, *Attaprakaram* and *Kramadipika*, were the earliest works in *Manipravalam* style. However, the earliest full-fledged *Manipravalam* work is the 11<sup>th</sup>-century work, *Vaisesika Tantram*. *Vaisesika Tantram* consists of a mother giving her daughter advice on the art of seduction.

Some other works of this kind include *Bhasha Kautilya*, the Malayalam commentary on *Arthashastra*. *Manipravalam* continued until the period of Cheruseri in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. His work *Krishnagatha* is a *Manipravalam* work.

**Classification of *Manipravalam* literature :** *Manipravalam* literature was classified into two branches - *Champus* and *Sandesha Kavya*. Champu literature consists of narratives in verse. The notable *Champus* were *Unniachicharitam*, *Unnichirutevicharitam* and *Unniaticharitam*, composed in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Devadasis was the central figure. These works, which also depicted the social conditions of the age, such as the *devadasi* system and *sambandham*.

The *Ramayana Champu* of Punam Namboothiri, *Naishadham Champu* of Mazhamangalam Narayanan Namboothiri, *Naishadham Chambu* authored by Mazhamangalam Narayanan Namboothiri were some of the later Champu works.

*Sandesa kavya*, as the name suggests, is the message poem. The earliest *Sandesa kavya* in the *Manipravalam* style was *Unnunilisandesam*, composed by an anonymous author in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The work consists of a vivid description of the route from Trivandrum to Kaduthuruthy and other historical accounts.

Another work in the *sandesa* style, *Kokasandesam*, was composed about 1400 CE. It is believed that some of the verses of *Lilatilakam* might have been taken from other *sandesa kavyas*.

### 5.2.3 Arabic, Chinese and European Travel Accounts

We know that Kerala was the hub of foreign traders and travellers during the medieval period. The accounts left behind by these people constitute the primary source of medieval history.

**Arab Travel Accounts :** The travel accounts of Arab travellers and geographers form an essential source for the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Sulaiman was the earliest Arab writer who visited Kerala in 851 CE. Sulaiman provided a vivid picture of Quilon and opined that Quilon was a prominent port of the time, and the Chinese ships touched this trading port during their voyages. Ibn Khurdadbeh arrived in Kerala during the 9<sup>th</sup> century and left a description of the land of Kerala, its self-sufficiency in food and exports of Kerala.

Alberuni (11th century) was a Muslim traveller who references medieval Kerala.

Idirisi (1154 CE) and Yaqt (1189-1229 CE) referred to Kerala's coastal towns and customs. While a 12<sup>th</sup>-century Arab traveller, Rashiduddin, provided a comprehensive reference to Kolathunadu, Al Kazwini compiled his work from other travel accounts and referred to Quilon. The accounts of Dimishqi (1325 CE) and Abdul Fida shed light on the 14<sup>th</sup>-century Malabar society.

Ibn Battuta visited Calicut several times and left us with a description of Calicut's port, ruler and the people. Battuta described the city of Calicut, the spice trade, and the Chinese vessels that visited the port.

The Persian ambassador, Abdur Razzak, visited Calicut in 1442. His work has a description of Malabar trade with Arab countries. He referred to Calicut as a secured harbour. These Arab travellers provide a historical account of the state, society, and economic activities in medieval Kerala.

**Chinese Travel Accounts :** The Chinese sources are another set of primary sources which we can rely on for Kerala history. The most relevant of these was the accounts of Hiuen Tsang, who visited India during the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. The Chinese sources of Wang Ta Yuan and Ma Huan are relevant for understanding the social-economic background. Wang Ta Yuan, who authored *Tao-i-Chilio*, visited Calicut and provided an account of Ezhimala and Calicut. Similarly, Ma Huan visited the Malabar Coast and described Calicut as an emporium of traders worldwide.

**European Travel Accounts :** The European travellers who visited Kerala after the 6<sup>th</sup> century provided numerous references to medieval Kerala. This section will list European travel accounts from the Portuguese to the British period.



Marco-Polo, the Venetian traveller, visited Quilon and other regions. He provided a detailed account of the country, ruler, people and natural resources.

Niccolo de Conti, an Italian traveller, visited Quilon and Cochin. His work provides ample reference to the spice trade of Quilon. He has also described the flourishing trade of Cochin port. During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian traveller Athanasius Nikitin describes Calicut port and the market.

The travel accounts are in abundance, particularly from the Portuguese period. The description of Ludovico De Varthema and Duarte Barbosa comes in the first place.

The Dutch period in Kerala is rich with valuable sources. The accounts of John Fryer, John Nieuhoff, and the *Letters of Canter Visscher* comprise a huge corpus of information regarding trade and other related activities.

*The English Factories* of Foster and Tavernier's *Travels* also throw light on the history of Kerala during the Dutch period. Hendrik Van Rheede and Itty Achuthan Vaidyar are credited with the work *The Hortus Malabaricus*, a detailed description of Kerala's medicinal plants, flora, and fauna.

During the British period, we have a bundle of records as sources. Ralph Fitch, who visited Kochi in 1583, elaborates in his description of Kochi and its port. The travel accounts of Francis Buchanan, Samuel Mateer and Francis Day are also relevant in Kerala history. Francis Day is credited with the work; *The Land of the Perumals* and Samuel Mateer authored *Land of Charity and Native Life in Travancore*. William Logan published the *Malabar Manual* and several treatises that furnished valuable sources on British history in Kerala.

## Recap

- *Granthavari* is the document that deals with the temple's land transactions and royal households.
- *Manipravalam* is a literary language mix of Malayalam, Sanskrit and Tamil.
- *Manipravalam* works can be categorised into *Champus* and *Sandesha Kavya*.
- The Arabic, Chinese and European travel accounts reflect the society, trade and polity of medieval Kerala.

## Objective Questions

1. What are *granthavaris*?
2. Which were the *granthavaris* of Perumbadappu Swaroopam?
3. Which temple is related to *Mathilakam Granthavari*?
4. Which was the script of *Manipravalam* works?
5. Who was the first to produce a proto-type of *Manipravalam* style?
6. Which was the full-fledged *Manipravalam* work?
7. What is *Champu* literature? Give two examples.
8. What is *Sandesha kavya*? Give two examples.
9. Who was the earliest Arab writer of Kerala?
10. Which Persian ambassador visited the court of Zamorin in 1442?
11. Which port in Kerala was described by Sulaiman?
12. Who were the two Arab travellers whose description is about Malabar?
13. Which Chinese traveller described Ezhimala and Calicut?
14. Who said that Calicut was an emporium of traders?
15. Which traveller described the spice trade of Quilon?
16. What was the work of Tavernier and Foster?
17. Who authored *The Hortus Malabaricus*?
18. Who authored *Malabar Manual*?

## Answers

1. Records of land transactions relating to the temples and royal households.
2. Perumbadappu Granthavari

3. Padmanabhaswamy temple
4. *Grantha*
5. Tolan
6. *Vaiseshika tantra*
7. Champu literature was narratives in verse. *Unniachicharitam*, *Unnichirutevicharitam* and *Unniaticharitam*.
8. Sandesha kavya is a message poem. Examples, *Unnunilisandesam*, *Kokasandesam*
9. Sulaiman
10. Abdur Razzak
11. Quilon
12. Abdur Razzak and Ibn Battuta.
13. Wang Ta Yuan
14. Ma Huan
15. Niccolo de Conti an Italian traveller
16. *The English Factories* of Foster and Tavernier's *Travels*
17. Hendrik Van Rheede
18. William Logan

## Assignments

1. Examine how the growth of Malayalam literature contributed to the evolution of historical knowledge in Kerala. Discuss the development of the Malayalam language and theories about its origin.
2. Describe the significance of Granthavari documents. List important Granthavaris used by historians.
3. Analyse the contributions of Arab, Chinese, and European travel accounts to the historical understanding of medieval Kerala.

## Suggested Reading

1. Ganesh, K. N., *Keralathinte Innalakal*, Kerala Bhasha Institute, Trivandrum, 2018.
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## Temples and Social Life

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ understand the evolution of temples as socio-economic, cultural, and religious hubs
- ◆ explain key debates surrounding the institution of temples
- ◆ learn about the institution of Sanketams around temples
- ◆ explore temple development and the evolution of temple art forms.

### Prerequisites

The age of Swaroopam brought significant changes to Kerala's social, economic, political, and cultural landscape. During this period, the role of temples grew beyond their religious function. With political patronage and state donations, temples became major socio-economic centers. Structural temples were built, renovated, and expanded, becoming focal points for both political and cultural activities. New art forms emerged, such as the koothambalam culture, transforming temple art into sacred expressions. Temples thus rose to prominence as central institutions in medieval Kerala.

### Keywords

*Sanketams, Koothambalam, Tevaratiyal, Tevatiyal, koothachi, Atigal*

# Discussion

## 5.3.1 Rise of Structural Temples

According to Kesavan Veluthat, the temple is a complex institution that emerged due to the expansion of wet rice cultivation. The agricultural expansion with irrigation facilities was centred on the major *Brahmana* settlements and helped grow temples as separate entities.

K. N. Ganesh observed that with the growth of agriculture, the existing social structure does not remain the same. Hence, he viewed the Brahmin villages and temples as intermingled with the growing agricultural relations.

According to M.G.S. Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat, the medieval temples, could be seen concerning the following points.

- a. The medieval temple served as an agency for surplus extraction from the peasants. It means that the temple gathered the surplus from the agricultural output, which led to the extension of agriculture and consolidation of the dominance of landlords.
- b. Temples consolidated landlordism.
- c. During its evolution, temples caused the disintegration of the tribal society and paved the way for the emergence of a caste-based society.
- d. In the new caste system, the temples functioned as an important agency that hierarchised the higher and lower services.
- e. The development of the bhakti

movement around the temple helped the religious institutions to accumulate religious authority.

- f. Temples became landed magnates, functioning as a store house of wealth and agrarian products.
- g. Temples functioned as an agency of cultural transmission and development.

### 5.3.1.1 Evolution of Temples as a Socio-Economic Entity

According to K. N. Ganesh, the management of temple expenses came through gifts and donations from the state and other individuals. These donations were in the form of endowments to the daily functioning of the temple. Along with these gifts, the temple lands were leased out to the peasants for cultivation. In this process, the temple receives a stipulated amount of paddy as rent.

The administration of the medieval temples was a complex task. Sivasankaran Nair opined that the temple administration was done through *Kazhakams* and *sabha*. These were the administrative bodies comprising 6 to 11 members. Along with these central institutions there was general administrative body of Brahmins called *Paratai*, *Urala Sabha* and *Mahasabha*. In the process of administration, gradually, the Brahmins became prominent. In the opinion of historians like M. G. S. Narayanan, Kesavan Veluthat, and K. N. Ganesh, the Brahmin assembly and temple administrators codified rules for managing the landed property. Thus, *Kacchams* as

codes of conduct were formed to regulate the rules on land transactions of temples and Brahmanas. Some of the prominent *kacchams* were *Moozhikulam Kaccham*, *Sankaramangalam Kaccham* and *Kandankattu Kaccham*. It shows that the administration of the medieval temple is a complex affair. Several functionaries were involved in the task of administration. Let us list out the significant functionaries related to the temple.

- a. **Kshetrapalaka:** Member of the ruling family
- b. **Varrier:** Accountant or secretary
- c. **Kurup:** Accountant or secretary
- d. **Poduval:** Accountant. In some temples, there were two Poduvals: Akapoduval, who managed the temple's internal accounts, and Purapoduval, who handled external accounts
- e. **Tantri:** Temple priest
- f. **Melsanti:** Senior priest
- g. **Keezhsanthi:** Junior priest
- h. **Kottikal or Uvaccar:** Drummers
- i. **Bhatta:** Learned Brahmin who recites and explains the Mahabharata
- j. **Nangacci or Tevatichi:** Dancing girls
- k. **Chakiyar:** Male actors performing Koothu

### 5.3.1.2 Architectural Features of Structural Temples

Rock-cut temples are the earliest temple structure carved out from a single stone. These structures were different from the structural temples in their pattern of construction. The structural temples of the present period appeared in the 8<sup>th</sup> century with additional structures like *sreekovil*, *mandapa* and gateways.

Kesavan Veluthat insisted that the rise of the structural temple is related to the spread of the bhakti movement in Kerala. Kulasekharas initiated the construction of structural temples during the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The primary purpose of these temples was to popularise the Brahmanical religion. The artistic evidence of these structures showed the efficiency and evolution of art and architecture in Kerala. Sreedhara Menon opined that the temple architecture in Kerala could be understood as having developed in three distinct phases.

The first phase (800-1000 CE) is represented by the temples constructed during the period of the Cheras. This phase contains components like *nalambalam*, *srikovil*, *namaskara mandapam* and *bali pita*. The second phase (1000-1300 CE) can be differentiated from the earlier one with evidence of Dravidian influence. The confluence of Kerala and Dravidian architecture styles was visible from the construction like those of the Padmanabhaswamy temple.

The last phase is marked by the consecration of multiple deities within the temple. Moreover, the *Sreekovil* emerged as the nucleus of the temple. The period was also marked by the construction of double domes, *mandapam*, and *koothambalam* adjacent to the temple.

### 5.3.2 Temple *Sanketam*

The Vanneri *Granthavari* provides sufficient inferences on the indigenous law system, which prevailed around the Trikkandiyur *Sanketam*. The Trikkandiyur *Sanketam* was a semi-autonomous territory under Vanneri Illam, under the influence of both the Chieftain of Vettam and Zamorin of Calicut. The effort in the compilation of Vanneri *Granthavari* brought light to the nature of *Sanketam*. M.G.S opined that the *Sanketam* reflected a complex feudal network between the Chief of Vettam and the religious authority of the *Sanketam*.

Professional historians have looked upon various aspects of the *Sanketam* with great interest. K N Ganesh analysed the process that led to the emergence of *sanketams*. According to him, the phenomenal increase in land donations after the Chera period is the main reason for the formation of *sanketams*. However, Kesavan Veluthat argued that the disappearance of the corporate character of Brahmin settlements, weakening of the temporal power and disappearance of the authority of *kacchams* paved the way for the emergence of *sanketams*.

M. G. S. Narayanan insisted that *Sanketams* were a quasi-autonomous territory comprising several villages organised around a prominent Brahmin temple. According to Padmanabha Menon, *Sanketams* had a defined territory with no power of the king. M.T. Narayanan insisted that the *sanketams* helped the Namboothiri Brahmins exercise their power in Kerala's politics. The authoritarian power of the Brahmin assembly increased with the development of these autonomous bodies.

P. K. S. Raja remarked that *Sanketams* were independent institutions that functioned beyond the control of the local Chief. However, M. G. S.

Narayanan analysed this position based on the information drawn from Vanneri *Granthavari*. He saw the development of *Sanketam* in terms of complex interdependence, which existed in a feudal society with the local chieftain and the Brahmins. Therefore, *Sanketams* were seen as a small territory of Brahmin authority in a *nadu* and depended on the neighbouring chieftains. However, these *Sanketams* managed their affairs and enjoyed political power in a partial sense.

According to K P Padmanabha Menon, *Sanketams* were independent republics free from the control of the kings. Their elected members carried the administration of *sanketams*. Simply, we can define *sanketams* as a self-governing unity with no sovereign authority.

#### 5.3.2.1 Features of Temple *Sanketams*

Some of the general features of these *Sanketams* are enumerated below:

- ◆ *Sanketams* were independent institutions that emerged around major temples. The *sanketams* were managed by *uralar* and had well-defined territory with separate jurisdiction.
- ◆ The *Sanketams* maintained an 'unwritten constitution' called *sanketa mariyada* or *desa mariyada*. M G S Narayanan acknowledged these laws as customary law, which were to be followed in a region.
- ◆ *Sanketams* were maintained with the help of rulers.
- ◆ However, the ruler does not have any authority over the functioning. Therefore, these

institutions functioned as ‘state within the state.’

- ◆ However, the rulers were given *melkoyma* rights over the *Sanketam*. For example, the rulers of Kochi, Palakkad and Kozhikode had their *melkoyma* rights over the Thiruvilwamala temple.
- ◆ The *sanketams* had the power to punish the rulers and had the right to collect taxes from the people.
- ◆ There were two kinds of *Sanketams*, *kshetra-sanketam* and *grama-sanketam*. *Kshetra-sanketam* was the *sanketam* of a new settlement around the temple. At the same time, *grama-sanketam* was the *sanketam* of 32 settlements.

Vanneri Granthavari refers to some of the institutions that prevailed in the *sanketam*. These were *Yogam*, *Pattini*, *Uttaram Chollal* and *Kaval Changatam*. The Panikkars were entrusted with the duty of *Kavalkkar*. The martial groups, called *Changatam*, were nominated from the Nair community by the chieftain to maintain law and order. They were rewarded for their service with *rakshabhogam* and *Kavalpanam*. These were generally a share of produce endowed for their service.

### 5.3.3 *Koothambalam Culture*

With the emergence of temple structures, temple art also evolved into its unique forms. Temple arts were patronised and performed around the major temples and became a common feature of the time. New art forms like *Koothu* and *Koodiyattam* evolved around the temples. *Koodiyattam*, *Chakiar koothu* or *Nangiyar Koothu* were temple arts performed on the auspicious days of temple festivals. The

new temple had separate buildings called *Koothambalam* to perform *koothu* art forms within the temple. *Koothambalam*s are the theaters in which the art form was performed. *Koothambalam*s were constructed in a rectangular pattern according to the treatise like *Tantra Samuchayam* and *Silpa Tantra*.

Chakiyar, Nangiyar and Koothachi performed the *koothu* and recited the story in the local language, called *malayanma*. *Prabhandham koothu* was the earliest form of Chakiyar *Koothu*. *Koothu* forms gradually became a temple art form performed during special occasions in the temple. It signifies the conversion of *koothu* from an entertainment art to ritualistic art during the medieval period. The Brahmins and *naduvazhis* played a significant role in changing their form to a temple art form.

Some exquisite *Koothambalam*s can be found in Vadakkumnathan temple, Tirunakkara Mahadeva temple, Guruvayur temple, Koodalmanikyam temple, Thirumandhamkunnu Bhagavathi temple and others.

#### 5.3.3.1 *Devadasi in Koothambalam Cultures*

*Devadasis* were attached to the temple in the medieval period. *Devadasis* were the dancing girls attached to the temples to perform meritorious activities, including raising funds for the temple through various performances. *Devadasis* were addressed with names like *Tevaratiyal*, *Tevatiyal*, *koothachi*, and *Atigal*.

The origin of the *devadasi* system in Kerala can be attributed to the beginning of the Kollam Era (825 CE). During the initial period, the post of *devadasis* was a prestigious one. We have references

of women from the royal family who joined the post. For example, Kulasekhara Alwar presented his daughter, Cherakula Nachiyar (Neela), as a *devadasi* in the Sri Rangam temple. These *devadasis* were obliged to perform meritorious activities for the temple, including raising funds through various performances. By the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the system became popular in Kerala society with considerable patronage from the rulers. The king encouraged poets to write poems that praise these *devadasis*. *Manipravalam* literature of the period like *Unniachicharitam*, *Unnicirutevicharitam* and *Illayacci Kavya* had *devadasis* as heroines.

By the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the post of *devadasi* became hereditary. The period

also witnessed the decline of the status of *devadasis* owing to their moral degradation. During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the system moved towards complete decline. When temple institutions began to be administered by Namboothiri and *naduvazhis*, the moral standard of *devadasis* declined and diminished and came to be regarded as objects of entertainment. A 15<sup>th</sup>-century work, *Chandrotsavam* testifies it.

The moral degeneration of the *devadasi* system made Queen Sethu Lakshmi Bhai abolish the system through a royal proclamation in 1930. At present, the system does not exist in Kerala society.

## Recap

- ◆ The evolution of structural temples began during the 8<sup>th</sup> century, particularly under Kulasekharas.
- ◆ Most of the structural temples had *nalambalam*, *srikovil*, *namaskara mandapam* and *balipita*.
- ◆ The feudal character of the period is evident from the institution called *sanketams*.
- ◆ The Brahmin uralar around famous temples organised *sanketams*.
- ◆ *Sanketams* were self-governing institutions having their jurisdiction.
- ◆ The king had some minor right over the temple *sanketams*, called *melkoyma*.
- ◆ The *Koothambalams* were the theatre to perform temple art forms.
- ◆ The *Devadasi* system was associated with the *koothambalam* culture of the medieval period.

## Objective Questions

1. What were the common structural features of the 8<sup>th</sup>-century temples?
2. Who managed *Sanketams*?
3. Who said, “Sanketams as independent republics free from the control of the king”?
4. Which institution functioned as ‘state within the state’?
5. What was the right of chiefs over *sanketams*?
6. Which were the institutions attached to the *sanketams*?
7. Which group protected *sanketams* from enemies? Name their reward for duty.
8. What is the theatre within the temple?
9. Which texts were utilised to construct *Koothambalams*?
10. What was the language of recitation of the *Koothu* stories?
11. Which were the names attested to *devadasis*?

## Answers

1. *Nalambalam, srikovil, namaskaramandapama* and *balipita*
2. Uralar
3. K. P. Padmanabha Menon
4. *Sanketams*
5. *Melkoyma*
6. *Yogam, Pattini, Uttaram Chollal* and *Kaval Changatam*
7. Changatam protects the *sanketams*. The rewards were called *rakshabhogam* and *Kavalpanam*

8. *Koothambalam*
9. *Tantrasamuchayam* and *Sipatantra*
10. *Malayanma*
11. *Tevaratiyal*, *Tevatiyal*, *koothachi*, and *Atigal*

## Assignments

1. Discuss the factors leading to the rise of structural temples in medieval Kerala, based on historians such as Kesavan Veluthat, K. N. Ganesh, and M.G.S. Narayanan.
2. Explain how the administration and economic management of temples in medieval Kerala shaped the social and economic structure. Include the roles of key functionaries.
3. Analyse the architectural evolution of structural temples in Kerala from the 8th to the 13th century. How did styles and features change over time?
4. Describe the concept and significance of temple Sanketams in medieval Kerala. How did these function as independent or semi-autonomous entities within the feudal and political framework?

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## Caste and Matriliney

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ understand the hierarchical division of society based on caste.
- ◆ learn about the matrilineal system in Kerala.
- ◆ be aware of Namboothiri patriarchy and related concepts.

### Prerequisites

The caste system is still a standing debate among scholars. Historians argue that the idea of caste evolved gradually. Society at this point was divided on the basis of occupational differences. These occupational divisions were organised hierarchically. Later, with the influence of temples, and the growth of *naduvazhis*, certain changes occurred in the societal organisation. These changes led to the caste classification. The caste-based society brought strict and rigid caste rules to maintain the supremacy of the high caste. The institution of untouchability and unapproachability also increased along with caste rigidity in certain communities.

### Keywords

*Marumakkathayam, Nair Matriliney, Sambandam, Smarthavicharam, Namboothiri, Karanavan*

# Discussion

## 5.4.1 Caste and Untouchability

The caste system in Kerala is said to have originated during the eighth century. Sreedhara Menon opined that the socio-economic changes that occurred after the Chola-Chera war strengthened the base of the caste system in Kerala. Historians observe that Kerala had three main divisions-Brahmins, non-Brahmins and *paniyalar* (workers) during the medieval period. The social system of Kerala was not based on the caste hierarchy but had occupational divisions such as *Panan, Parayan and Tudiyan*. Rajan Gurukkal and other historians maintain that the changes in the social structure occurred with the emergence of Brahmin supremacy, agrarian expansion, division of labour and expansion of Brahmin village settlements.

### 5.4.1.1 Evolution of Caste System in Kerala

Rajan Gurukkal elaborated on the process of the emergence of caste. Social relations began in the 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries with the spread of wet-rice cultivation, and it further led to the proliferation of occupation and the ordering of social hierarchy. These hereditary occupational groups were later absorbed into the *jati* hierarchy.

The division of labour was the first significant development associated with the transformation of the clan to *jati*. The Brahmin village settlements were composed of a hereditary professional group of labourers. When village settlements increased, the hereditary occupational groups also enlarged, indicating the proliferation of caste.

Gradually, professional groups were organised into separate castes according to their profession. The medieval society was conceived as a temple-centred agrarian society. The temple employed several people in various services. Historians like Rajan Gurukkal saw the emergence of caste hierarchy from this level. The hierarchy was based on labour, and the learned *Brahmanas* became the *tantrikal* of the temple. They were followed by *santhi, bhattar* etc. The non-Brahmins, like *potuval* and *Varier*, undertook the managerial responsibility of the temple. In due course of time, the hierarchical organisation of the temple service became a hereditary post and was converted to castes.

While overviewing the evolution of caste, it is crucial to understand the significant features of the caste system. The most important feature of the caste system was the existence of a hierarchy. The *Brahmins* associated with the temple were given the place of pre-eminence in the hierarchy. *Nairs* and *Tiyyas* of *Ezhavas* occupied the next prominent position after *Namboothiri*. The *Nairs* were the martial class who were given training in arms. The *Tiyyas* or *Ezhavas* by profession were toddy tappers. However, these groups also receive training in martial arts like *Nairs*. The lowest section of the society consisted of *Pulayan, Parayan, Kammalas* (artisans), *Mukkuvas, Pulayas, Parayas* and *Kuravas*.

### 5.4.1.2 Proliferation of Caste

The proliferation of caste resulted in a complex societal setup. The upper caste imposed several restrictions on inter-dining and inter-marriages,

unapproachability and inaccessibility of public places. The lower section of the society had to maintain distance from the upper caste. The low caste denied their right to access temples, schools and public places as they were regarded as ‘polluting classes’. The Namboothiri Brahmins determined the nature of pollution based on proximity. Therefore, they kept certain castes at a distance.

#### **5.4.1.3 Hierarchisation of Castes**

It can safely be concluded that the social stratification began with the proliferation of Brahmana settlements in agrarian tracts. This transformation had been running parallel with the growth of plough agriculture, division and specialisation of labour. After this process, the hereditary occupational groups emerged. These occupational groups organised themselves into castes, and the hierarchisation of castes took place.

#### **5.4.1.4 Issue of Untouchability**

The idea of pollution can be represented through the institution of *Mannapedi* and *Pulapedi*. The *Mannan* and *Pulaya* caste enjoyed the privilege of polluting the *Nair* women. According to this system, if a lower caste man saw a woman of upper caste, he would throw a stick or stone so that she would be polluted and expelled from her community. Usually, the *Mannan* or *Pulayan* who polluted the women would take her. Sheikh Zainuddin and Duarte Barbosa referred to this custom in their travel accounts.

#### **5.4.2 Problem of slavery**

Rajan Gurukkal has held that the

transformation based on the hereditary specialisation of labour involved the aspects of servitude. The features of slavery thus present the nature of extra-economic coercion. He also insisted that the emergence of caste, division of labour and proliferation of caste increased the issues of slavery. Ibrahim Kunju also viewed that the caste system promoted slavery in Kerala. The labourers were obliged to render their service to the high caste. These sections became the *adiyalar*, servile group. The *adiyalar* group, including *pulayas*, *parayas* and *cerumas*, were considered untouchables and constituted the slave class. They were attached to the agrarian land of their Brahmin landlord.

The first among them to discuss was *Pulayan*. He is also called *Cheruman* and *Cherumakkal*. *Pulayan*, the agrarian labourers of the landlord. *Parayan* comes next to *Pulayan*. *Parayan* was not allowed to use public paths used by the high castes. *Parayan* had to maintain a strict social distance from the *savarnas*. Other agricultural serfs were *Vettuvan* and were responsible for doing agrarian works. The *Ullatans* and *Nayadis* were considered *Chandalas* of the plain. At the same time, *Malayans* and *Kadans* were the *Chandalas* of the forest.

#### **5.4.3 Nair Matriliney and Nambutiri Patriarchy**

##### **5.4.3.1 Marumakkathayam System**

One of the common practices of inheritance that existed among the Nairs in Kerala was the *Marumakkathayam* system. For example, the Nair family, like Ponathil House (Kochi) and Puthumana Tarawad (Malappuram), followed the

matrilineal inheritance system.

*Marumakkathayam* means tracing the inheritance to property and succession through the sister's children in the female line. In this system, the right to property ownership exists through the female line. Historians have different opinions regarding the antiquity of the *marumakkathayam* system. However, there is a consensus that *marumakkathayam* as a system of inheritance prevailed in almost all the communities in Kerala throughout the medieval period. Some of the opinions of the historians are as follows.

- a. The *Keralolpathi* testifies that *marumakkathayam* is an age-old practice and *makkathayam*, or paternal inheritance system, was unfamiliar to ancient Kerala.
- b. P T Srinivasa Iyengar holds that *marumakkathayam* was unknown to Kerala society until the tenth century.
- c. While K P Padmanabha Menon opined that *marumakkathayam* did not prevail until the thirteenth century, it came to force only by the fourteenth century. He believes that certain compelling forces pushed the evolution of the system.
- d. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai supported and agreed with the view of P T Srinivasa Iyengar and K P Padmanabha Menon by testifying that the *marumakkathayam* system originated because of the compelling socio-economic pressures during the Second-Chera period. He opined that the political and religious dominance of the Brahmins, the emergence of the *janmi* system,

compulsory military training and the growth of the military group named *Chavers* during the Chola-Chera war led to the conversion from patrilineal to the matrilineal system.

- e. M G S Narayanan disagreed with the above opinion. He argued that the idea had been exaggerated. He argued that the matrilineal system came into practice in Kerala in the ninth or tenth century CE.
- f. Sreedhara Menon pointed out a compromise view regarding this. He suggests that the *marumakkathayam* system must have been the prevailing system of inheritance in medieval Kerala, and the system might have halted until the prominence of the patrilineal caste system.

#### 5.4.3.2 Theories of Origin

1. Brahmanical theory: It states that the system was connected with Parasurama. According to this theory, Parasurama had ordered Sudra women to put off the chastity and cloth to satisfy the desires of the Brahmin. This theory is closely connected with the custom of *Sambandam* prevailing among the Namboothiri and Nair families.
2. Property theory: It states that the system was introduced to prevent the partition of family property and keep the Nair *tarawad* intact.
3. Military theory: This theory held that the Nair women were forced to have *sambandam*

with Namboothiri as the Nair men were most of the time on the war front.

4. T K Gopala Panikar presented the socio-economic reason for the origin. He insisted that the origin of *marumakkathayam* is connected with the polyandry and promiscuity that prevailed among Nairs. In this system, the family property will be transferred only to the sister's sons in the female line.

How does the system function? We know that Kerala followed a joint family system. The family called *tarawad* consisted of descendants from the female line. The eldest woman of the *tarawad* was called the *Taravattamma*. However, the family's day-to-day administration was vested with the eldest male member of the family, *Karanavan*. The junior member of the *Tarawad* was the *Anantharavan*. He had no right to property and just succeeded in the post of *karanavan* according to seniority.

#### 5.4.3.3 *Sambandam*

Now let us examine some social customs associated with *marumakkathayam*. *Sambandam*, a social custom associated with it, allowed only the eldest male member to get married in the Namboothiri Brahmin family. It was an inbuilt custom put in place to safeguard the property within the family. In such situations, the younger Namboothiri male members would prefer to have marital relations with the women of Nair *tarawad*. In this relation, the Namboothiri male is free of any obligations and responsibilities. The women and children of *Sambandam* had no right over the property of the father. Eventually, the brothers and sisters and the sisters' children inherited the property

of Nair *tarawad*.

#### 5.4.3.4 *Smarthavicharam*

Namboothiri women, *Antarjanam*, were kept under strict seclusion and avoided mingling with the outside world. The Namboothiri household considered women as objects and inferior to men. In order to establish male supremacy, several norms and customs were imposed on women.

The *smarthavicharam* of Savitri or Kuriyedath Thatri and her ex-communication from her community was a sensational event in 1905. Thatri was married to Chemmanthatta Kuriyedathu Raman Namboothiri at a very young age. She was accused of adultery, and her trial lasted for six months. The *Smarthan*, along with prosecutors, began questioning her. She accepted her charge and disclosed the name of every other man equally guilty in this case. The case became a shame to the Namboothiri caste. Hence, the king decided to excommunicate everyone involved with the case, including Kuriyedathu Thatri.

The *smarthavicharam* is an example of the rigid customs and norms that prevailed in the Namboothiri caste. What does it signify? In the Namboothiri-dominated social system, women were subjected to live under the strict patriarchal norms of society. *Smarthavicharam* means the Namboothiri caste tribunal. It is a judicial trial for Namboothiri women who were accused of adultery. The judges were from the leading Namboothiri family and were called *Smarthan*.

The cases of adultery have first informed the case to the ruler. The ruler eventually appoints judges for the trial (*vicharam*) and issues summons (*thittu*). Meanwhile, the

accused will be separated from the family to another place she is accused of being impure. What happened if the accused confessed to the charge? The accused women will be excommunicated from their caste with the orders of the Chief. The men

related to the *smarthavicharam* cases had to go through *Satya-pariksha* or *kaimukku* at Suchindram temple. The judgement showed the discriminatory nature of the law that favoured male Namboothiri and imposed strict restrictions on women.

## Recap

- ◆ Caste evolved due to the temple-centred agrarian economy, Brahmin supremacy, and village settlements.
- ◆ Social stratification began with the proliferation of Brahmana Settlement.
- ◆ The idea of pollution is related to untouchability.
- ◆ *Mannapedi* and *Pulapedi* - two customs that show the rigidity of the caste.
- ◆ The Caste system promoted slavery in Kerala.
- ◆ *Marumakkathayam* prevailed among Nairs
- ◆ Several theories have been forwarded about the origin of this system.
- ◆ *Tarawad* (joint family) is an important institution of the *marumakkathayam*.
- ◆ *Karanavan* carried the day-to-day administration of the *tarawad*.
- ◆ *Sambandam* - social custom associated with *marumakkathayam*
- ◆ *Smarthavicharam*- an example that demonstrates Namboothiri patriarchy.

## Objective Questions

1. Who was placed at the highest position in the caste hierarchy?
2. What was the basis of caste and the proliferation of caste?
3. Which were the two social customs that represent the evils of untouchability?
4. Which term denotes 'slaves' in medieval Kerala society?

5. What was the name attributed to the agricultural slaves?
6. Which line of inheritance carried the right to property in the *marumakkathayam* system?
7. Who was the eldest female of the *tarawad*?
8. Who was the eldest male member of *tarawad*?
9. Which member had no right to property of the *tarawad*?
10. What was the caste tribunal of Namboothiri called?

## Answers

1. Brahmins
2. Division of labour
3. Mannapedi and Pulapedi
4. Adiyalar
5. Pulayan
6. Mother's line
7. Tharavattamma
8. Karanavar
9. Anantharavan
10. Smarthavicharam

## Assignments

1. Discuss the origins and evolution of the caste system in Kerala from the 8th century onwards, highlighting the role of Brahmin supremacy and agrarian expansion.
2. Analyse the social and economic implications of the *Marumakkathayam* system among the Nairs in Kerala, including the theories of its origin

and its impact on property inheritance.

3. Examine the practice of untouchability in medieval Kerala, focusing on the restrictions imposed on lower castes and the concept of pollution as depicted through *Mannapedi* and *Pulapedi*.

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## Cultural Practices

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ understand the prominent cultural practices in Medieval Kerala
- ◆ explore the connection between cultural practices and political legitimacy
- ◆ gain insight into the evolution of cultural practices during the period

### Prerequisites

The period following the emergence of Swaroopams saw significant changes in both polity and society, with the rise of new cultural practices and institutions. These practices not only showcased the pride and grandeur of the rulers but also reinforced their political authority. The evolution of temples, along with the control exerted by the Namboothiri Brahmins and *Naduvazhis*, played a key role in spreading and developing cultural activities in Kerala. Institutions like Kalari gained prominence, often serving the political needs of the nadu chieftains. As such, these cultural practices reflect the political trends of the time.

### Keywords

*Mamamkam, Chavers, Zamorin, Revathi Pattathanam, Kalaripayattu, Kalari, Ankam, Pathinettara Kavikal, Bharathapuzha, Nilapaduthara*

# Discussion

## 5.5.1 *Mamamkam*

The ballads of Kerala comprise the valour and strength of warriors. The stories of the period mainly were in praise of their war skill. The *Mamamkam* festival showcased the skills and talents of the suicide squads called *Chavers*. *Mamamkam* also was once a cultural festival where people from different *nadus* would meet and interact.

*Mamamkam* was a cultural festival of Kerala conducted once in twelve years on the banks of Bharathapuzha at Thirunavaya. The proper inference of the *Mamamkam* festival was evident from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The work *Keralolpathi Kilipattu*, *Kozhikodan Granthavari* of Zamorins and literature like *Kokasandesam* and *Chandrolsavam* provides ample description of this festival.

### 5.5.1.1 Evolution of *Mamamkam* festival

Until the period of Perumals, the festival was conducted by *raksha purushas* of four *kazhakams*. Later, the Perumals became the *rakshapurushas* and conducted the festival under the ruler of Mahodayapuram. With the disappearance of the kingdom, the position of *raksha purusha* was transferred to the Chief of Valluvanadu. From then on, the festival was presided over by the Valluvanadu chief.

The story of *Mamamkam* starts from this event. The position of *rakshapurusha* (protector of the festival) is considered prestigious, and the festival *Mamamkam* showed the Chieftains grandeur, wealth,

and pride. Seeing the prestige of the Valluvanadu chief, the Zamorin of Calicut became jealous and made plans to attack the Valluvanadu chief. The Zamorin's force under Koya attacked Valluvanadu chief at Tirunavaya in 1486 CE and snatched the position of *rakshapurusha* from him. Since then, Zamorin became the *rakshapurusha* of the festival, and under him, the festival was conducted with pomp and pride.

### 5.5.1.2 Zamorins and *Mamamkam*

The defeat of the Valluvanadu chief eventually resulted in the creation of a group called *Chavers*. *Chavers* were the group of suicidal warriors of Valluvavakonathiri who tried to restore the *rakshadikari* status of Valluvanadu chief. Valluvanadu chief sent his warriors with the mission to kill the Zamorin and reinstate his position as *rakshapurusha*. However, the Zamorins army would kill the *Chavers* before they could touch *nilapaduthara*, which is Zamorins' customary seat during the occasion. The dead bodies of the *Chavers* were then thrown in the *manikinar*.

*Mamamkam* continued with its pride until the invasion of Mysore. According to K V Krishna Aiyer, the last *Mamamkam* was conducted in 1765, before Hyder Ali's arrival. Zamorins could not conduct the festival when his kingdom was acceded by the British, which led to the complete decline of the festival.

## 5.5.2 *Revathi Pattathanam*

*Revathi Pattathanam* was a literary assembly held during the period of

Zamorins. The assembly gained its name as it was held on the day of *Revathi* asterism during October-November. The assembly was held at Tali Temple at Calicut and was called '*Taliyil Thanam*'. The festival got its name from '*Bhattadana*', later converted to *Pattathanam*. Scholars from different places attended the assembly. The distinguished scholars among *Prabhakara Mimamsa*, *Bhatti Mimamsa*, *Vedanta*, *Vyakarana* and *Vedas* subjects were given the title '*Bhatta*'. Uddanda Sastrikal, who authored *Kokasandesa* and *Kakkaseri Bhattachari*, were associated with *pattathanam*. The defeat of Uddanda Sastrikal by Kakkaseri Bhattachari is one of the famous incidents of *Pattathanam*. Attaining the title of '*Bhatta*' was not an easy task. Melpathur Narayanan Namboothiri was rejected for the title six times. At the end of the delegation, Mangat Achan was proclaimed the winner from the judges' list. Later, Zamorin was granted the title of '*Bhatta*' and a *panakizhi* with 101 *panams*.

The institutions of *Revathi Pattathanam* were also related to *Pathinettara Kavikal* in the court of Zamorins. However, the arrival of Tipu in the 18<sup>th</sup> century disrupted the smooth functioning of *Pattathanam*. The institution stopped for a while due to internal struggles. Later, they agreed to conduct the assembly once in twelve years. Sources suggest that it continued until 1934 and declined entirely after that.

### 5.5.3 *Kalari*

The northern ballad has many stories associated with *Kalari* and *Kalaripayattu*. These ballads testify to the valour of heroes like Aromal Chekavar, Thacholi Othenan, Thacholi Chandu and Unniyarcha. The oral tradition of ballads made the institution of *Kalaripayattu* alive through the songs of panar. The Pana community, who often narrates the valour stories of

warriors of *Kalaripayattu*, propagates the ballad songs.

*Naduvazhis* were in constant conflict with other principality. The chieftains of nadu maintained their army with efficient soldiers trained in martial arts. The institution of *Kalari* became prominent in the medieval period to spread the lessons of martial training. *Kalari* is the gymnasium that trains warriors in martial arts, called *Kalaripayattu*. The institution provided training to all communities like Nair, Ezhava and Thiyya. Guru taught the lessons of *Kalaripayattu* in a scary place. The students were given training using weapons like swords, daggers and spears.

#### 5.5.3.1 *Ankam*

*Ankam* is a military fight that existed in medieval society. It is a fight between two trained *Kalari* warriors to settle the dispute. The best example to give is the story mentioned in *Vadakkan Pattukal*. The ballad mentioned the *ankam* between Aromal Chekavar and Aringodar Chekavar.

When a dispute arises between families that cannot be solved in the village assemblies, the concerned parties will settle the dispute through *ankam*-the warriors were called *Ankacheckavar*. *Ankacheckavar* was employed by somebody. He need not necessarily be part of the dispute. The custom was that the party involved in the dispute would approach the *chekavar* for *ankam*. The *Chekavar* would accept the request as the *Ankam* is considered a matter of honour. The acceptance to participate in *Ankam* is represented by accepting *Ankapanam* or the amount. The *Ankam* fight subsequently led to '*Kudipaka*' between the families. *Kudipaka* was the hatred or revenge that would continue till the opponent's death.

## Recap

- ◆ *Mamamkam* was a cultural festival held once in twelve years on the banks of Tirunavaya.
- ◆ The Zamorin of Calicut conquered the position of *rakshapurusha* of *Mamamkam* from the Valluvanad chief.
- ◆ Valluvanad chief sends *Chavers* or suicidal squad to kill Zamorin during every *Mamamkam* festival.
- ◆ *Revathi Pattathanam* was the literary assembly held at Tali temple, Calicut.
- ◆ The festival confers the title “*Bhatta*” to the eminent scholars of the debate in various streams.
- ◆ The institutions of *Revathi Pattathanam* were related to *Pathinettara Kavikal*.
- ◆ *Kalari* is the institution that provides training to the soldiers in *Kalarippayattu*.
- ◆ *Ankam* was in military combat.

## Objective Questions

1. Which were the two sources that give reference to *Mamamkam*?
2. Who led the Zamorins force in the conquest of Tirunavaya?
3. Which was the suicide squad of the Valluvanadu chief?
4. Which all scholars were associated with *Revathi Pattathanam*?
5. Whose 'Bhatta' title was rejected six times?
6. Which institution was formed after *Revathi Pattathanam*?
7. Which was the ballad that gives reference to the *Kalari* system?
8. What was the military combat of *Kalari* warriors?
9. Which *Kalari* is entrusted with the training of soldiers during *Mamamkam*?

10. Who proclaims the winners of *Revathi Pattathanam*?
11. Who granted the title of “Bhatta”?
12. Where does *Revathi Pattathanam hold*?
13. Where does the Zamorin use to sit during the *Mamamkam* festival?
14. Where did the dead bodies of the Chavers dispose of?
15. When did the last *Mamamkam* hold?

## Answers

1. *Keralolpathi Kilipattu, Kozhikodan Granthavari* of Zamorins and literature like *Kokasandesam* and *Candrotsavam*
2. Koya
3. Chavers
4. Uddanda Sastrikal and Kakkaseri Bhattatiri
5. Melpathur Narayana Namboothiri
6. Pathinettara Kavikal
7. Vadakkan Pattukal
8. Ankam
9. Changampally Kalari
10. Mangat Achan
11. Zamorin
12. Tali temple, Calicut
13. Nilapadu Thara
14. Manikkinar
15. 1765

## Assignments

1. Describe the historical significance of the Mamankam festival and its socio-political impact between the Valluvanad chief and the Zamorin of Calicut.
2. What was Revathi Pattathanam, and how were scholars recognised with the title ‘Bhatta’? Mention some notable scholars associated with this event.
3. Explain the role of Kalari and Kalaripayattu in medieval Kerala. How did these institutions reflect the martial culture and conflict resolution practices of the time?

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# Towards Colonialism





## Vasco Da Gama Epoch

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be:

- ◆ describe the significance of European maritime explorations towards the East
- ◆ analyse the socio-economic and political conditions of the Kerala coast prior to the arrival of European powers
- ◆ examine the nature of interactions between the major chiefdoms of Kerala and the Portuguese during the early colonial period
- ◆ identify and assess the causes, course, and consequences of Portuguese intervention on the Kerala coast

### Prerequisites

The history of Kerala has been closely linked to maritime trade and long-distance commercial exchanges. Its geographical position, along the Arabian Sea ensured accessibility for foreign traders and travellers. This continuous interaction with various regions of the world shaped the economic, social, and cultural life of Kerala in many ways. The prolonged engagement of the region with international trade distinguished it from many other parts of the Indian subcontinent and it has contributed to the development of a diverse and composite cultural tradition.

Over the centuries, Kerala witnessed the presence of Arab, Roman, Chinese, Jewish, and other trading communities. However, a major transformation in Kerala began with the arrival of European powers towards the end of the fifteenth century. This phase coincided with what is commonly described in world history as the ‘Age of Exploration’ or ‘Age of Discovery’ , a period marked by intensified European efforts to discover new maritime routes and establish direct links with Asian markets.

The voyage of Vasco da Gama to the Malabar coast in 1498 represented a crucial moment in this process. As the historian K. M. Panikkar observed, this event was the culmination of a two-hundred-year-old ambition and seventy-five years of continuous maritime enterprise by the Portuguese. The explorations of earlier travellers like Marco Polo, Friar Odoric, and Monte Corvine had already brought accounts of Asia's wealth to Europe, which fuelled the desire for direct access to Eastern commodities.

These commercial ventures contributed not only to the expansion of world trade but also laid the groundwork for the rise of European colonial empires. The pursuit of wealth through commerce was closely accompanied by ambitions of territorial conquest and imperial control. At this juncture, the arrival of the Portuguese in Kerala and their early activities on the Malabar coast assume prime importance. Now let us examine the arrival of Vasco da Gama and the subsequent colonial interventions that reshaped the course of Kerala history during the early modern period.

## Keywords

Colonialism, Religious policy, Portuguese, Exploration, Trade, Resistance

## Discussion

### 6.1.1 Commercial Relations Before the Arrival of the Europeans

It is crucial to know the socio-political and economic context in which the Europeans extended their roots in Kerala. After the eclipse of the Cheras of Mahodayapuram in 1123, Kerala witnessed the emergence of small *nadus* (chiefdoms). Among them were Venad in the South, Kolathunad in the North, Perumpadappu Swarupam in Cochin and the Zamorin's territory, which lies between Kolathunad and Cochin. However, a unifying central power was lacking, and the *nadus* existed as independent political units. Furthermore, the chiefdoms of Kerala were fighting with each other to establish their supremacy. This political disarray on the Malabar coast and numerous ports

on the coastline were favourable to the Europeans to make intrusions. In addition, the trade opportunities helped them gather commercial benefits and attain territorial advantages over the Kerala coast.

Until the arrival of the Europeans, the Arabs, Jews, Christian, and Chinese traders were carrying on coastal trade. The local rulers had been extending patronage to these merchants. The domination of Syrian and Persian Christians in trade is quite evident in Quilon under the Venad rulers. Historians have ascertained this based on epigraphic evidence such as the Syrian copper plates. Calicut was yet another vital centre of internal as well as external trade. The Zamorin, one of the most powerful among the local chiefs of Kerala, could accumulate huge gains from the trade with the Arabs.

It is a well-known fact that Kerala was recognised as the land of spices. It was only in this part of the world that the spices, most importantly pepper, were available in huge quantities. No surprise that merchants from all over the world, especially from the Mediterranean world, came to the Kerala coast from time immemorial. The most important reason for the dependence on spices was that it could be used as a preservative. Europeans dried their meat with salt and pepper, which was saved for use in the winter season. Hence, for Europeans, the primary interest in coming to Kerala lay in the hunt for spices.

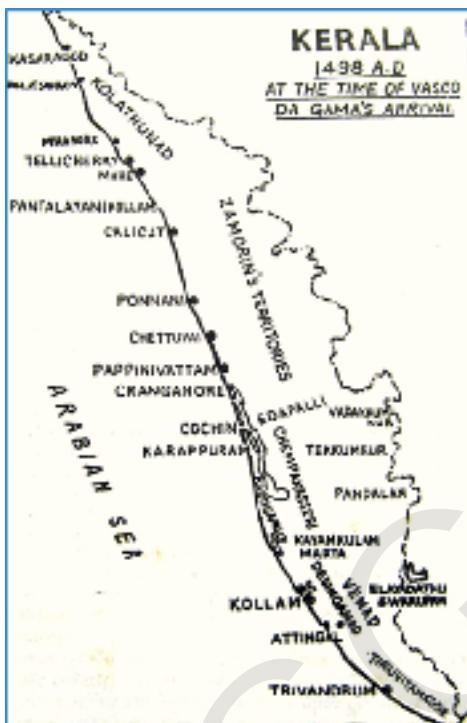


Figure 6.1.1 Map of Kerala (1498 AD)

The missionary records, travel accounts and literary works related to this period enable us to distinguish the trade centres, port towns and foreign settlements. Historians could draw a general picture of the political and economic developments on the Malabar coast using such records. Such prominent centres include Pantalayinikollam, Madayi, Puthupatanam, Valarpattanam, Cherupattanam and Quilon. Pepper, coconut, fish, areca, textiles, food grains, and ornaments were in demand for export. These goods were primarily carried in the

vessels. Though the price of the goods was calculated based on the money, the actual transaction took place in the barter principle. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier emphasise that monetisation did not substitute the earlier transaction method.

Towards the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese solemnised their trade relationship with the Zamorin. Chinese, Arab, Jewish, and Christian foreign trade on the Malabar coast declined with the coming of Europeans.

### 6.1.2 Advent of the Portuguese

Much has been said about Vasco da Gama's arrival to the Kerala coast and the events connected with it. The event altered the nature of the global economy and polity. It is rightly regarded as a turning point in the history of the world.

Historians were curious about the toils and struggles that remain in the background of the geographical explorations. Among the Europeans, the Portuguese and the Spanish were the pioneers in the eastward maritime explorations. What prompted them was their easy access to the two water zones- The Mediterranean on one side and the Atlantic on the other. Their spirit of adventure had prompted them to go beyond the Mediterranean. Thus, the seventy-five years of consistent effort in

understanding all techniques of navigation and explorations resulted in finding new routes towards the East and the West.

Prince Dom Henry' The Navigator' of Portugal intensely provided the motivation, guidance, and financial assistance for the voyages. According to Portuguese historians, Henry considered his mission as the command of God. He sought the knowledge of mathematicians, cartographers and astronomers to learn about maritime navigation. He even gathered knowledge from Muslim voyagers who had made long distance-travels in the sea. Henry found a Naval Academy for the navigators and the mariners to impart the latest scientific knowledge.

Moreover, Henry built strong, fast, and light vessels suited for distant voyages. In 1454, Pope Nicholas V permitted him to conduct expeditions up to India. The voyages of Bartolomeu Dias to Cape of Good Hope in 1487, the discovery of the American continent by Christopher Columbus in 1492 and Magellan's circumnavigation of the globe at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century are some of the outstanding achievements of Spain and Portugal.

The intense trade between Europe and Kerala existed through the land routes of Constantinople. When the Ottomans captured Constantinople in 1453, the prominent trade link between Europe and Asia minor was closed. Further, the long-standing religious rivalry between the Christians and Muslims from the Crusades resulted in the Europeans finding trade routes away from the Muslim-dominated areas. The most important reason which forced the Europeans to find a new route through the sea was the capture of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks. European nations like Spain, Portugal,

Holland, France, and Britain extended their support to navigators and explorers.

This Unit deals with the causes and impact of the Portuguese influence on Kerala society. It is necessary to make an overview of how the Portuguese made their entry into Kerala. Vasco da Gama was on his ambitious expedition to discover a new route to India. His foremost objective was to expand trade with the Orient and open a sea route connecting the East and the West. Over time, the conditions within Kerala helped them think of 'building an empire'. The bitter rivalries between the local powers helped them fulfil their objectives. Their intention to monopolise the spice trade and expand the kingdom into an empire lasted until other European countries like Dutch, French and British entered the scene.

On 18<sup>th</sup> May 1498, Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese Navigator, who set his foot in Kerala, marked a new beginning in Kerala's history. Little did he know that he would change the future of Kerala. In Malabar, Gama was received by the Zamorin, the ruler of Calicut. As the most powerful ruler of Kerala, Zamorin was hoping to establish his ascendancy over Kerala by conquering Venad (Travancore) in the South, Kolathunad in the North and Cochin in the middle. He might have thought of realising his dream by using trade relations with the Portuguese to obtain other forms of help. He gave him permission for trade. Gama proposed an exchange of spices with the goods he carried for trade. However, Zamorin rejected the proposal, resulting in hostility between the two. Moreover, the locals informed the Zamorin about Gama's intention of conquest rather than trade.



Fig 6.1.2 Vasco Da Gama

As a part of securing his position in Malabar, Gama looked for support from alternate political power. The search turned him to Cannanore, where Kolathiri, the rival of Zamorin, offered him support. He exchanged his goods there and gathered pepper. On 20<sup>th</sup> November 1498, he returned to Portugal. It is estimated that

The Portugal King, Dom Manuel 'the Fortunate', wanted to explore new trade centres on the western coast and establish a monopoly over the Indian Ocean. It was a coincidence that Vasco da Gama was entrusted with the mission to the East. Gama started his journey from Lisbon on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1497 with 170 people, including Portuguese prisoners. The team faced hustles and hardship on the way. Some of them, including his relatives, died due to scurvy. A translational work by E. G. Ravenstein (1898), on a journal written by an anonymous author who belonged to Gama's crew, describes their entire journey towards the East. The author speaks about their visit to a monastery-like structure, where they did their prayers. They misunderstood the temple as a Church and the goddess of the temple as St. Mary. Moreover, the native Hindus as Christians.

heavy artillery in 15 ships. On the way, his fleet attacked a vessel of Haj pilgrims returning from Mecca, including 240 men, women and children. For four days and nights, they resisted the Portuguese to protect their ship. Finally, the Portuguese plundered the ship and set it on fire.

the cost of the goods he brought back was sixty times the cost of his entire voyage.

Later, in 1500, Dom Manuel sent Pedro Alvares Cabral accompanied by 1200 Portuguese traders and soldiers in 13 ships to Calicut. He was also welcomed by the Zamorin and allowed to build a good shed. However, Arab merchants remained a significant threat to their schemes to collect the spices, resulting in a conflict between them. Cabral adopted an aggressive mode to establish the Portuguese monopoly. He ransacked more than ten ships of Arabs at Calicut port and bombarded them. Then, he sought help from the Cochin ruler for trading facilities. He was permitted to build a factory in Cochin. In his return journey to Portugal, Cabral procured spices, including pepper from Kerala. This time, the Portuguese realised the necessity of a war against the Zamorin and Arabs to gain dominance over Malabar coastal trade.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1502, the Portuguese King sent Gama again to Calicut. This time he was accompanied by armed fighters and

After reaching the Kerala coast, Gama demanded compensation from Zamorin for the losses he suffered during his previous visit. He also demanded assurance from Zamorin to expel the Muslim traders, especially Marakkars, from Calicut. Since Zamorin rejected his demands, the

enraged Gama attacked Zamorin's envoys and killed many traders and fishermen. In addition, he kept women and children as captives and harmed and murdered them. He also caused heavy damage to the port town of Calicut.

Later, Gama made a treaty with the ruler of Cochin. Accordingly, the Portuguese could purchase the goods for a price mutually agreed upon by the two of them. Moreover, they were allowed to construct a fort at Cochin. The Portuguese erected their fort for the first time in India, Fort Manual. Eventually, the Portuguese started establishing their dominance over the Indian Ocean trade. The Portuguese rulers used the *cartaz* system to control the sea and attack the traders. *Cartaz* means the approval of the Portuguese ruler to navigate in the Indian ocean. The imposition of *cartaz* was an indirect attack on the local rulers who possessed authority in the marine space.

In 1505, Francisco Almeida was appointed as the first Viceroy of Portuguese India. Almeida was entrusted with the construction and strengthening of Portuguese forts. The Portuguese actions alerted Zamorin, and he informed Kolathiri about the Portuguese intentions

in Kerala.

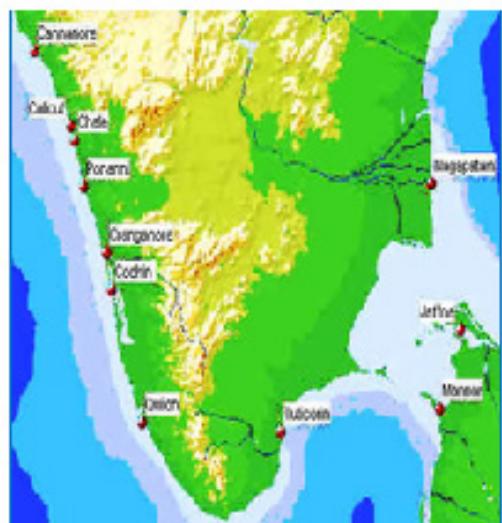


Fig 6.1.3 Portuguese fort and settlements in South India

Meanwhile, Zamorin sought the help of Egypt through the Muslim merchants at Calicut. Thus, the Sultan of Egypt sent a naval force to Calicut under the Captainship of Mir Hussain. In 1508, the collective forces of the Zamorin, the Sultan of Egypt, defeated the Portuguese at Chaul. However, the Portuguese regained their strength by attacking the Egyptians and the Zamorin.

The following year, Alfonso-de-



Albuquerque was appointed as the Portuguese Viceroy in India.

He realised that the Zamorin was their potential threat on the Malabar coast and adopted a strategic method to deal with him by making a friendly treaty in 1513. The new Zamorin permitted selling all the spices to the Portuguese and constructing a fort at Calicut. In return, the Portuguese decided to extend the support to Zamorin against the rulers of Cochin and Cannanore. Albuquerque was the man behind this achievement of the Portuguese. He planned to shift the Portuguese headquarters from Cochin to Goa. However, he died in Goa on his way back to his home in 1515. The successors of Albuquerque were incompetent and corrupt in their affairs in Kerala. Hence, his death affected the diplomatic relationship of the Portuguese with Kerala.

Fig 6.1.4 Gama's reception by Zamorin (Philip Baldaeus, 1672)

In December 1524, Gama died at Cochin during his third visit to Kerala. His death followed several clashes between both parties. Kunjali Marakkars led Zamorin's naval force against the Portuguese. The fragmentation in the political power of Kerala and the decline of Zamorins helped the Portuguese achieve their targets in Kerala. Meanwhile, the Arabs supported the local chiefs with less authority and opened trade links with them.

### 6.1.3 The Portuguese Rivalry with Calicut

The Zamorin's refusal of the Portuguese demands often led to bitter hostilities between the two. The construction of a fort at Chaliyam in 1513 by the Portuguese enabled them to coerce or intimidate Zamorin's naval fleet as and when they desired. Already he was worst affected by the battles and the revenue loss due to the decline in trade. Moreover, the Portuguese entered into defensive and

offensive alliances with some significant native rulers in their battle with Zamorin. The seriousness of the situation made the Zamorin sign a treaty with the Portuguese in 1540. With the treaty, he agreed to sell the pepper in Calicut to the Portuguese at the rates in Cochin and allowed the Portuguese to provide a pass to Arab ships. Meanwhile, the Portuguese agreed not to interfere in the war between Zamorin and Local powers. The rulers of Quilon and Purakkad were also allied with the Portuguese.

Later, when the 1550 war occurred between the Cochin and Vadakkumkur, Zamorin and the Portuguese sided with the rival groups. Further, the Portuguese destroyed the coastal towns in the Zamorin's territory. In 1564, Kolathiri seized Cannanore fort, renamed St. Angelo fort. However, after four months of siege, the Portuguese managed to win Kolathiri back to their side. The capture of the Portuguese fort, St. Angelo, by Kolathiri and the defeat of Vijayanagar, the Portuguese ally, in the battle of Talikotta (1565) made the situation favourable for Zamorin to extend his battle against the Portuguese. Thus, in 1570, Zamorin allied with the Sultan of Bijapur and Ahmednagar. The following year, Zamorin besieged the Portuguese fort at Chaliyam, which became a severe blow to the Portuguese. However, the Portuguese continued their efforts to regain power at Calicut. They persuaded Zamorin and sought permission to build a factory and a church in his territory. This created conflicts with the Zamorin and Kunjali Marakkars, who were Zamorin's naval force commanders.

#### 6.1.3.1 Kunjali Marakkars

Kunjali Marakkars is an iconic figure in the annals of Kerala history and is

recognised as one of the most valiant fighters against the Portuguese. They were the spearhead of Zamorin's naval force and stood as the symbol of the maritime tradition of Kerala. However, their origin remains a mystery. The commonly accepted assumption regarding the lineage of the Kunjalis is that they were former Arab settlers. They were coastal traders and the cargo suppliers of the region. Later, they became the Admirals of the Calicut fleet and assisted Zamorin in battles against the Portuguese.

In order to get support in overseas trade, Kunjalis maintained a friendly relationship with the Portuguese in the initial days despite the system of *cartaz* (naval trade license or pass issued by the Portuguese) imposed on them. However, the relationship was not always stable. *Cassados* were the progenies of the Portuguese men in their local spouses. The emergence of *cassados* as organised traders under the Portuguese brought about an economic rivalry with the Marakkars.

Until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Marakkars resisted the Portuguese in establishing hegemony over Malabar with their force. They used guerrilla tactics on the enemy ships. For this purpose, they made small ships that a few people manned, could move faster in the sea and could be maneuvered easily. The vessels were more effective in fighting Indian waters than the larger Portuguese ships. The attacks of Kunjalis against the Portuguese reached their peak during the 1530s. In 1524, they wrecked several Portuguese vessels and caused heavy loss to them. The repeated blows to the Portuguese in Kerala made the Portuguese realise that their real threat was the Marakkars. They persuaded Zamorin to oust them from the sea premises. The Portuguese naval force under Dom Henrique de Menezes, the successor of Vasco da Gama, destroyed the

ships of Marakkars at Ponnani and attacked Panthalayani Kollam, their strong base.

As mentioned earlier, following the fall of the Chaliyam fort in 1571, Zamorin allowed them to construct a factory and a church in his territory due to the continuous Portuguese efforts. Kunjali Marakkars objected to the Zamorin - Portuguese alliance. Meanwhile, he declared himself 'Lord of the Indian seas' and strengthened his fort at Kottakkal. Moreover, Kunjali confronted Zamorin's envoys and chopped the tail of one of the elephants belonging to the Zamorin. The enraged Zamorin sought an alliance with the Portuguese to suppress Kunjalis. In 1600, Zamorin's force of 6000 men helped the Portuguese naval force attack the Puduppatanam fort of Kunjali. Kunjali and his men surrendered and pleaded for pardon to Zamorin on 16<sup>th</sup> March 1600. However, Zamorin handed him over to the Portuguese on the condition that he would be treated with dignity.

Nevertheless, the Portuguese took Kunjali to Goa, where they executed him and disgraced his corpse by cutting his body into pieces and exhibiting it to the public. Then, Kunjali's head was salted and sent to Cannanore to be displayed there to consider it a strong warning to the enemies of the Portuguese. The above incident filled the Zamorin with remorse as it was an act of treachery committed by the Portuguese in blatant violation of their promise. Following this incident, the relationship between the two was strained. Even though the Marakkars threat ended, the arrival of the Dutch paved the way for the Portuguese decline in Kerala.



Fig 6.1.5 Kunjali Marakkars Memorial  
erected by Indian Navy at Vadakara

## 6.1.4 The Religious Policy of the Portuguese in Kerala

The Portuguese understanding of religions was limited to Catholic Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. They tended to misjudge the indigenous population of Kerala as Christians. Gradually, they realised the faith of the native rulers of Kerala and noticed the stronghold of Arabs in the Kerala coastal trade. Moreover, they witnessed a harmonious relationship between Muslims and the Zamorin of Calicut. The Portuguese had a long-standing religious rivalry with Muslims from the days of the Crusades. This dispute is reflected in their efforts to eliminate them from the Malabar coastal trade networks. It has prompted the Portuguese to use the religious distinction to disrupt the prevailing communal harmony in the trade network and turn the equations in their favour.

It may be recalled that the entire eastern expedition of the Portuguese was fuelled by their desire for spices and their spirit of adventure. The opportunity for missionary

zeal comes much later. Then, they spread their gospel in the newly acquired colonies and perpetuated hostility towards the Muslims of those regions. They attacked the Muslim ships and vessels in the Indian ocean. Furthermore, the Portuguese King instructed the mariners to open war against the dominance of Muslims in the Sea. The burning of ships returning from Mecca and the sinking of the vessel carrying spices belonging to the Mamluk sultan of Egypt were a few examples of the Portuguese atrocities towards the Muslims in the Indian ocean. *Tuhfat-al-Mujahidin*, a work of the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Shaikh Zainuddin, mentions that the anti-Muslim stand of the Portuguese affected the Muslims of the region and made their life miserable.

As Muslims were the most affected community by the Portuguese religious policy, they resisted tooth and nail to defend their religion.



Fig 6.1.6 Mattancherry church

Other than getting hurt by the religious sentiments, the commercial interests of the Arabs were also under challenge. The Portuguese forbid them from conducting trade in the expensive spices and restricting them from sailing on the Arabian Sea for trade. Hence, their trade was confined to locally available goods such as areca nut, coconut, and clothes. It was a severe blow

to the religious and commercial interests of the Muslims, who had enjoyed much freedom in trading activity in the Indian Ocean before the arrival of the Europeans.

Apart from the hostility towards the Muslims, large-scale brutal conversion of non-Christians into Christianity and Latinisation of the non-Catholic sect had taken place. These kinds of actions annoyed the local communities of Kerala. There were instances of the Portuguese treating the non-Christians brutally. Albuquerque restricted non-Christians from entering the Portuguese forts and ordered them to be murdered. Those who enjoyed some material advantages were only the newly converted locals and the Christian offspring (*cassados*) in the native women from the Portuguese men.

The Portuguese found various churches and seminaries in Kerala to spread religion and train priests. These institutions include the Cranganore seminary (1541), Jesuit college at Cochin and Vaipikotta seminary. In 1555, they found the Diocese of Cochin for the Latin Christians and the converts. With the coming of Jesuits, the propagation of Christianity was intensified. St. Francis Xavier converted the fishermen and lower caste and backward section of the society around the coastal region of the southern part of Kerala. The chiefs and the upper caste section of the society did not get affected by this conversion. Furthermore, as their status or source of income was not in any danger, they hardly paid any attention to the Portuguese religious policy.

#### 6.1.4.1 The Synod of Diamper and the Oath of Coonan Cross

As a part of establishing the dominance of Latin in the Roman Catholic church and the supremacy of the Roman Pope over the

St. Thomas Christians of Kerala, a diligent Latinisation effort began. The Portuguese accorded baptism and other rituals to Latin sacraments. They found various Church institutions in different parts of Kerala. Towards the establishment of supremacy over the Syrian Christians, a convention was summoned at Udayamperur in June 1599 under Alexis de Menezes, the Archbishop of Goa. This famous assembly consisting of 813 representatives was known as 'The Synod of Diamper'. The Synod kept the Syrian books under scrutiny and removed the offending passages in them. Some of the books they considered heretical were burnt. The Synod cut off the prolonged Babylonian connection of Churches in Kerala and placed the Roman Pontiff. However, the intentions of the Synod provoked the Syrian Christians to turn against the Portuguese.



Fig 6.1.7 Coonan Cross monument at Mattancherry

The Portuguese King appointed Latin Bishops to the Ankamali Diocese, a Syrian church. According to the Syrians' request to the Babylon Patriarchate, he sent a Bishop, Ahatalla, to Kerala in 1653. The Portuguese authorities detained Ahatalla in Mylapore. A rumour of Ahatalla's death incited the Syrian Catholics to gather in thousands at Mattancherry Church. Holding a rope tied to the old Cross in the Mattancherry Church, they took the oath not to accept or recognise the authority



Fig 6.1.8 Chavittunatakam

of the Latin Bishops or the Jesuits. This incident is known as the 'Oath of the Coonan Cross'. This issue, in turn, crippled the Portuguese programmes of Latinisation of the native Christians.

### 6.1.5 Impact and Decline of the Portuguese Contact

The one hundred- and the six-year gap between the arrival of Vasco da Gama and the Vander Hagen of Dutch brought immense changes in the socio-political and economic arena of Kerala society. The trade relation between Kerala and Europe enhanced that the goods from Kerala grabbed higher prices in the European market. Moreover, European goods found their market and circulation in Kerala. Portuguese introduced crops like cashew, tobacco, custard apple, guava, pineapple, and papaya in Kerala. Spices were exported to the European markets on a large-scale basis. Kerala cultivated coconut commercially to export coir and other coconut products. However, with the increase in the inflow of European goods, age-old trade contacts with Arabs weakened.

The Portuguese built churches and palaces and thus introduced the European style of architecture. With the advent of the Portuguese, the local rulers gave away

their traditional weapons. They started to turn towards advanced European warfare techniques and weapons such as guns, cannons, artillery and horses. The Portuguese period in Kerala also witnessed several new towns like Cochin, similar to the European ones. As a part of training the Christian priests, they found seminaries and colleges in important towns in Kerala. The foundation was laid for Indological studies and translating Portuguese works to Malayalam. Various travel accounts added to the understanding of the Portuguese. The establishment of the Printing press by the Portuguese brought a revolutionary change to Kerala. In the cultural sector, the growth of *Chavittunatakam*, similar to the Kathakali art form of Kerala, developed under the Portuguese.

However, the Portuguese epoch began to decline with the coming of the Dutch. The Portuguese failed to establish a Government in its conquered territories. Moreover, the nepotism of the authorities, corruption, and disunity accounted for their decline. The strong opposition of local rulers and the arrival of the Dutch and British paved the way for their withdrawal from the Kerala coast.

Moreover, some of the officers engaged in private trade, which weakened the overall economic strength. The absence

of firm military support and financial resources affected their functioning. Portugal had become part of Spain under Philip II, which distracted the Portuguese King from their Eastern mission. Besides all these factors, one of the leading causes of the Portuguese decline was their religious policy. It invited the wrath of

the native population, and the subsequent conflicts and clashes weakened the position of the Portuguese in Kerala. Moreover, the resultant political vacuum created within Kerala society paved the way for the Mysorean rulers and other foreign invaders.

## Recap

- ◆ Overseas trade of Kerala
- ◆ Trade with Arabs, Jews, Christians and Chinese
- ◆ Gama's meeting with Zamorin
- ◆ Gama- Kolathiri alliance
- ◆ Cabral's visit to Kerala
- ◆ Gama's attack on pilgrimage ship
- ◆ Portuguese - Cochin alliance
- ◆ Construction of Fort Manual
- ◆ Almeida's visit to Fort St Angelo
- ◆ Portuguese defeat at Chaul (1508)
- ◆ Albuquerque's treaty with Zamorin (1513)
- ◆ The shift of Portuguese capital from Cochin to Goa
- ◆ *Cartaz* system
- ◆ Emergence of *cassados*
- ◆ Attack of Marakkars on Dom Henrique de Menezes
- ◆ 1571 Chaliyam fort attack
- ◆ Surrender of Kunjali Marakkar
- ◆ Missionary efforts and Conversion

- ◆ Jesuit mission in Kerala
- ◆ The Synod of Diamper and the Oath of Coonan cross
- ◆ Decline of Portuguese

## Objective Questions

1. Which are the important trade centres in pre-modern Kerala?
2. Who were the first Europeans to find the new sea route to India?
3. When and where did Vasco da Gama land in Kerala?
4. Who was Francisco Almeida?
5. When and where did Synod of Diamper take place?
6. When did the Oath of Coonan cross take place?
7. What were the significant goods exported to Europe from India?
8. Which are the new food crops introduced by the Portuguese in Kerala?
9. Which were the European powers who arrived after the Portuguese for trade?
10. What was the Cartaz system implemented by the Portuguese?

## Answers

1. Pantalayinikollam, Madayi, Puthupatanam, Valarpattanam, Cherupattanam, and Quilon
2. The Portuguese
3. 27th May 1498, Calicut
4. The First viceroy in Portuguese India.
5. June 1599, Udayamperur

6. 1653
7. Spices, mainly pepper and coconut products
8. Cashew, tobacco, custard apple, guava, pineapple, and papaya
9. The Dutch and the British
10. A type of maritime trade license

## Assignments

1. Describe the socio-economic and political conditions of Kerala on the arrival of the Europeans. What is the role of topography in the international trade relation of Kerala?
2. Discuss the nature of coastal trade relations of Kerala with Arab and European traders in the pre-modern period. How did it change with the arrival of the Europeans?
3. Examine the role and significance of Kunjali Marakkars in the resistance against the Portuguese.
4. Evaluate the religious policies of the Portuguese in Kerala and their impact on the local population. Discuss the activities of Jesuit mission in Kerala.
5. Explain how the work *Tuhfat -al- Mujahidin* is used to reconstruct the history of Kerala during Portuguese Colonialism.

## Suggested Reading

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## Dutch in Kerala

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be:

- ◆ explain the circumstances that led to the advent of Dutch power on the Malabar coast
- ◆ analyse the process of the formation of Travancore as a modern state
- ◆ examine the nature of Kerala's political, economic, and cultural relations with the Dutch during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries
- ◆ assess the social, economic, and cultural impact of Dutch presence and activities in Kerala

### Prerequisites

Following the establishment of Portuguese settlements and trade monopolies along the Malabar coast, the Dutch, referred to locally as 'Lanta', emerged as a prominent European power in the region. Although the Portuguese were the first Europeans to establish an empire in India, their dominance weakened after the Spanish annexation of Portugal in 1580. It ultimately hastened the arrival of the Dutch and the British.

The Dutch, having secured independence from Spanish rule in 1581, soon began overseas expansion. In 1595, Captain Houtman initiated Dutch ventures to the East. It led to the formation of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in 1602 through the merger of several competing firms. Within a short span, the Dutch established settlements across the Indian Ocean world, from South Africa to the East Indies.

By the seventeenth century, they engaged in a continuous conflict with the Portuguese and gradually displaced them from strategic settlements. The Dutch

captured Ceylon in 1658 and asserted naval supremacy in the region. In 1660, under Admiral van Goens, a Dutch fleet advanced towards the Malabar coast, which further intensified Dutch involvement in political and commercial affairs of Kerala. In this unit, let us examine the arrival of the Dutch and their influence on the economy, society, and state formation of the region.

## Keywords

Dutch East India Company, Pepper Monopoly, Battle of Colochel, Treaty of Mavelikkara, Dutch Architecture

## Discussion

### 6.2.1 Dutch- Portuguese Relations

Unlike the Portuguese, the Dutch intention on the Malabar coast was considered commercial rather than territorial expansion or religious propagation. Their apparent intention was to displace the ruler of Cochin, Raja Kerala Varma. However, the main object remained the dislodging of Portuguese from the Malabar Coast. In 1602, the Dutch East India Company was established to enhance trade relations with the Indian subcontinent. A fleet of Dutch naval forces under Captain Admiral Steven van Der Hagen started their journey from the Netherlands in December 1603, wandered around the sea, faced all hurdles, and reached Cannanore in 1604, 106 years after the arrival of the Vasco da Gama. However, fearing the rage of the Portuguese, the ruler of Cannanore hesitated to welcome them.

Another difficulty they faced in Malabar was the Portuguese alliance with the native rulers of Kerala. Therefore, they had to find a potential political power that would be hostile to the Portuguese.



Fig 6.2.1 Steven van Der Hagen

However, the harsh religious policy of the Portuguese and their aggressive political interventions in Kerala generated hatred towards them. This situation created a gap for the Dutch to establish themselves in Kerala. Besides this, to gain local support by demonstrating their naval power, they captured a Portuguese ship sailing to Ceylon. Zamorin of Calicut became impressed by the Dutch maritime strength.

Knowing the hatred of native people and local rulers towards the Portuguese, the Dutch offered support to the Zamorin, who was at war with the Portuguese.

at Cranganore. Moreover, the Dutch accepted him as the 'emperor' of Kerala, which Zamorin had been pining for a long time. Hence, Admiral Steven Van Der Hagen signed a treaty with Zamorin and allied with him to expel the Portuguese from India. It was the first trade treaty signed by Dutch with an Indian ruler. The Dutch East India Company was granted freedom in trade matters. Thus, they could establish themselves on the Calicut coast.

The Dutch fleet under Admiral Pieter Willems Zoon Verhoff landed on the Malabar coast on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1608, and greeted the Zamorin with valuable presents such as red clothes, mirrors, corals, swords, and guns held by the Portuguese. They were permitted to build an unfortified factory at Calicut. They traded the articles such as spices

(pepper), rice, salt, firewood, cotton, areca nut, conch, indigo, timber, lime, bricks, coconut oil and coir with Kerala.

In the meantime, the British had already begun their trade with India. Dutch allied with the British and the local rulers to establish their trade objectives. Antoine Van Diemen, the Dutch Governor-General (1636-1645), tried to maintain a cordial relationship with the local rulers of the Kerala coast. In 1642, they constructed a factory at Purakkad and acquired the trade monopoly in pepper at Kayamkulam in 1643.

After the capture of Ceylon from the Portuguese in 1658, they turned towards the Portuguese territories in Kerala. Cochin became their trade centre. In 1658, a Dutch naval force under the command of

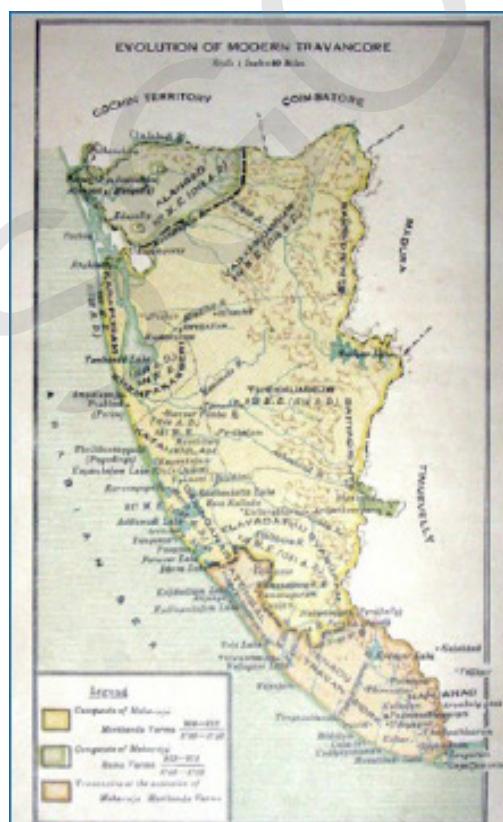


Fig 6.2.2 Map of Travancore

Admiral Van Goen captured Quilon fort, a strong base of the Portuguese. In 1662, they defeated the Portuguese at Cranganore and ousted them from Purakkad, Cochin and Cannanore.

The hostility between the Portuguese and Dutch in Europe continued on the Kerala coast. The 1661 attack on the Portuguese by the Dutch with 1200 men from Ceylon marked their establishment of supremacy. Another blow to the Portuguese was the Dutch capture of the Cochin with the help of Zamorin and Paliyath Achan on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1663. Dutch intervened in the war of succession between the branches of the Cochin Royal family. Dutch and Portuguese sided with either of the parties. After the capture of Cochin, they seized Fort St. Angelo at Cannanore from the Portuguese in February 1663. However, Dutch power did not last for long.

### 6.2.2 Dutch in Travancore

The rise of Travancore was an important reason for the decline of the Dutch in Kerala. During the 1660s, Travancore was not yet a kingdom. However, it remained as various chiefdoms such as Travancore, Quilon, Peritalli, Elayadath Swarupam, Karunagappally, Kayamkulam, Karthigapalli, Pantalam, Ambalapuzha, Tekkumkur, Vadakkumkur, Punjar, Alengat, Edappally, Parur and so on.

Among these chiefdoms, Peritalli (1719), Karunagappally (1720) and Karthigapalli (1730) became part of Kayamkulam.

While the Dutch strengthened their position on the Kerala coast, Marthanda Varma (1729-1758) was trying to bring the nearby chiefdoms of Travancore under him and strengthen the Travancore kingdom. Marthanda Varma pursued a “blood and iron” policy to suppress the feudal *pillamars* and *madambimars* to make royal authority supreme in the kingdom. Under him, Travancore rose to a strong centralised monarchy and a powerful military state. His expansionist policy affected the Dutch prospects in the trade as they were procuring spice from those chiefdoms. Marthanda Varma annexed almost all the Dutch possessions at Quilon, Marta, Kayamkulam and Purakkad to his Kingdom. In 1739, Dutch made an alliance with the rulers of Cochin, Tekkumkur, Vadakkumkur, Purakkad, Quilon and Kayamkulam.

Meanwhile, when the ruler of Elayadath Swarupam passed away in 1736, Marthanda Varma opposed the succession of Elayadath's wife to power. This was when Gustaff Willem van Imhoff, the Dutch Governor at Ceylon, visited Cochin to deal with the Dutch affairs in Malabar. Although he requested Marthanda Varma to restore Rani to her position, he refused the



Fig 6.2.3 Bolgatty Palace, Cochin

request. Thereupon, the Dutch declared war against Travancore before receiving permission from Batavia, the headquarters of the Dutch East Indies, founded in 1619.

The Dutch sent their troops from Ceylon to Travancore under the command of Captain Johannes Hackert. They attacked the Travancore army at Quilon. From there, they advanced towards Attingal and Varkala. Marthanda Varma and the Dutch fought a war at Kalkulam, the capital of Marthanda Varma. On 10<sup>th</sup> August 1741, Marthanda Varma defeated them in the **Battle of Colachel** and the Dutch captain, Eustachius De Lannoy, surrendered to Marthanda Varma. It was the first time in history that an Asian ruler defeated a European naval force.

The Dutch supported the ruler of Kayamkulam in his battle against Marthanda Varma and captured Kilimanur fort in 1743. They signed the Treaty of Mavelikkara on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1753 with the Travancore ruler. The Dutch agreed to refrain from intervening in the war between Travancore and other local rulers. Later, they sold their Fort St. Angelo at Cannanore to Ali Raja in 1771. Eventually, in 1789, the rest of their forts at Ayacottah and Cranganore were sold to Travancore.

In Malabar, they made alliances with the local chiefs and monopolised the entire trade. However, the Mysore invasion and the rise of the British decided the fate of the Dutch in Kerala. The Dutch received the final blow when the British attacked the Dutch fortress in Cochin on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1795.

### 6.2.3 Dutch Impact on Economy and Culture

The primary aim of the Dutch was pepper monopoly of the East. They imported sugar, copper, tin, lead, camphor,

and silk. The Dutch negotiated various treaties with the native rulers to achieve their aim. However, their intervention helped to improve the economy of Kerala through the introduction of scientific cultivation methods. This involved scientific coconut farming in places like Pappinivattom in Calicut. They showed a keen interest in indigo plantations, coconut oil production, coir products, salt farming and the dyeing industry. The major ports which carried all these trade activities were Cochin, Anjengo, Colachel and Tengapatanam. Dutch brought varieties of fruits, animals, and birds to Kerala. They introduced indigo plantations. Their influence is visible in gardening, furniture work, and the infrastructure of houses in Kerala. Apart from these, they set up a leprosy hospital at Pallipuram to treat the suffering leprosy patients.

Unlike the Portuguese, Dutch paid hardly any attention to the religious conversion of the native population. They were tolerant of the native beliefs and the religious fervour of the natives. However, their intolerance towards the Portuguese religious institutions was reflected in their attitude towards the Roman priests. They demolished their places of worship, convent, and educational institutions. In 1698, they destroyed a Jesuit library at Cochin. At the same time, they protected the religious sentiments of the Syrian Christians and the Hindus. They caused no harm to their religious institutions and places of worship.

The Dutch influence is very much visible in the city of Cochin. They left behind remarkable monuments such as Bolgatty Palace, which they built at Cochin in 1774. This palace remains a hallmark of Dutch architecture in Kerala. Another one is the Dutch Palace at Mattancherry, the oldest of the European buildings constructed in

Kerala. Mural paintings enrich the palace. They blended the Dutch style with the traditional Kerala style of architecture. They also built wooden country houses near backwaters and garden houses. One of the important architectural marvels is shown in the palace, Kalikotta of Saktan Tampuran, at Tripunithura.



Fig 6.2.4 Van Rheede

One of the most important contributions of the Dutch is the compilation of the monumental work *Hortus Malabaricus*. This Latin expression means 'Garden of Kerala.' The main content of the work is the medicinal properties of the flora of Kerala in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. *Hortus Malabaricus* was the product of a combined effort of the Dutch and the Keralites. Van Rheede, the Dutch Commissioner General, published the work in Amsterdam, the Dutch capital, between 1686- 1703 in 12 volumes. The important scholars included in the work were Ranga Bhatt, Vinayaka Bhatt, Appu Bhatt, Carmelite Mathew and Itti Achuthan. In addition to *Hortus Malabaricus*, various accounts were written by the Dutch like Visscher, Nieuhoff, Linschoten and Baladeus. However, the absence of Dutch seminaries and educational institutions in Kerala reflects their lack of interest in the education sector.

## Recap

- ◆ Van Hagen's treaty with Zamorin
- ◆ Construction of Purakkad factory
- ◆ The capture of Ceylon, Quilon fort and Cochin
- ◆ The capture of St. Angelo fort at Cannanore
- ◆ The emergence of the Travancore kingdom
- ◆ Marthanda Varma's expansionist Policy
- ◆ Annexation of Dutch possessions at Quilon, Marta, Kayamkulam and Purakkad
- ◆ Dutch alliance with Cochin, Tekkumkur, Vadakkumkur, Purakkad, Quilon and Kayamkulam (1739)
- ◆ Imprisonment and escape of Rani of Elayadath Swarupam

- ◆ Battle of Colachel and surrender of De Lannoy
- ◆ Treaty of Mavelikkara and sale of Dutch forts to Travancore
- ◆ British attack of Dutch fortress in Cochin
- ◆ Introduction of scientific cultivation
- ◆ Introduction of Indigo plantation
- ◆ Construction of Leprosy hospital at Pallipuram
- ◆ Construction of Bolgatty palace
- ◆ *Hortus Malabaricus* and its compilation

## Objective Questions

1. When was the Dutch East India Company established?
2. Who signed the first Dutch treaty with Admiral Van Der Hagen in 1604?
3. When did the Dutch capture Portuguese possessions in Ceylon?
4. Who was the Commander of the Dutch naval force in attacking the Quilon fort?
5. Who helped the Dutch in capturing Cochin from the Portuguese?
6. Which is the first battle won by an Asian ruler against a European power, and when did it happen?
7. Which were the major events that led to the decline of the Dutch in Kerala?
8. Which are the major Dutch ports in Kerala?
9. Who published *Hortus Malabaricus*?
10. What is the central theme of *Hortus Malabaricus*?
11. Who were the authors of the work, *Hortus Malabaricus*?

## Answers

1. 1602
2. Zamorin
3. 1658
4. Admiral Van Goen
5. Zamorin and Paliyath Achan
6. The Battle of Colachel, 10th August 1741
7. The Mysore invasion, the Malabar conquest, and the rise of the British
8. Cochin, Anjengo, Colachel and Tengapatanam
9. Van Rheede
10. The medicinal properties of the flora of Kerala (17<sup>th</sup> c)
11. Ranga Bhatt, Vinayaka Bhatt, Appu Bhatt, Carmelite Mathews, and Itti Achuthan

## Assignments

1. Discuss the cultural contribution of the Dutch to Kerala with a particular focus on art, architecture, and literature.
2. Discuss the foundation and modernisation of the political structure of Travancore under Marthanda Varma.
3. Evaluate the strategic alliances made by the Dutch with local rulers in Kerala and their impact on the Portuguese presence in the region.
4. Examine the impact of the Dutch on the economy of Kerala.
5. Discuss the reasons behind the decline of Dutch power in Kerala, with a focus on the rise of Travancore under Marthanda Varma.

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## Early British Settlements

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be:

- ◆ explain the circumstances and processes that led to the establishment of British settlements and forts in Kerala
- ◆ analyse the evolution and modernisation of local chiefdoms in response to early British interventions
- ◆ examine the nature of Anglo-French conflicts in the Indian Ocean region, with particular reference to their impact on Kerala

### Prerequisites

The preceding units have examined the establishment of Portuguese and Dutch settlements along the Kerala coast. Following these European powers, both the British and the French entered Kerala in pursuit of trade opportunities. By the late sixteenth century, several European countries sought to expand their commercial interests in the East, with the Spanish and Portuguese initially dominating the sea routes to the East Indies.

In 1588, King Philip II of Spain dispatched the Spanish Armada, a formidable fleet of 130 ships, to attack Britain. Its defeat marked a turning point in European maritime history. Shortly after, Holland declared independence from Spanish rule, and both the Dutch and British intensified their efforts to participate in the profitable Eastern trade.

Meanwhile, Queen Elizabeth I authorised British merchants to trade in the East Indies recognising the growing Dutch dominance in the spice trade. It further led to the foundation of the British East India Company on 31 December 1600. An early pioneer of British presence in Kerala was Ralph Fitch, often referred to as the 'Vasco da Gama of the British', who arrived at Cochin in 1583 with fellow merchants.

The initial voyages undertaken by British traders proved highly profitable, which prompted increased competition with other European powers. The British began seeking alternative commodities and markets. It ultimately turned towards Indian textiles such as cotton and silk. These early commercial activities laid the foundation for the eventual expansion of British political control and empire building in India. In this Unit, let us discuss the formation of early British settlements in Kerala and their interaction with local chiefdoms, and the major colonial rivalries of the period.

## Keywords

British Settlement, Trade, British policy, Travancore, Cochin, British-French relations

## Discussion

### 6.3.1 Early British Settlements in Kerala

In 1609, as a part of finding trade centres in India, Captain Hawkins was sent to Mughal emperor Jahangir's court. He requested the emperor's permission to build a factory at Surat. Nevertheless, the Portuguese, who had already established their base in the Indian subcontinent, threatened the British. Hence, they retrieved their decision to construct a factory due to the opposition from the Portuguese.

However, the British were persistent in their decision. In 1615, Captain Keeling anchored at Calicut with three ships. Sir Thomas Roe was one of the travellers. He joined the court of Jahangir. Meanwhile, in Kerala, Keeling signed a treaty with the Zamorin and assured him to help them overthrow the Portuguese from Cranganore and Cochin. Even though Zamorin granted them trade permission, the British hardly fulfilled the promises made in the treaty. Instead, they were assigned to open factories at Ponnani and Calicut and returned to their country.

Towards the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, the British signed an agreement with the Portuguese and acquired permission to access all the Portuguese ports in Kerala. In 1636, they sent the first pack of Pepper to Britain from Cochin. Gradually as their trade ambitions grew, they enhanced their activities, building forts and factories in different places. They made a factory at Vizhinjam in 1644. However, the Dutch seizure of the Portuguese belongings and the capture of the Cochin in 1663 affected the British plans. In 1664, Zamorin permitted them to erect a factory at Calicut. In 1684, the British set up a factory at Anjengo with the permission of Rani of Attingal. Anjengo factory became an important British stronghold on the Kerala coast.

The British tried to maintain their hold on the North of Kerala by establishing factories. There is uncertainty about the date of the first factory they set up at Tellicherry. The colonial historians suggest an approximate date between 1683 and 1695. The Regent of Kolathunadu permitted the British to build a factory at Tellicherry. However, the site provided to build the factory happened to be in the



territory of Kurangoth Nair. He opposed the construction of the factory. The Company faced resistance from the local population and the local chiefs, including Kolathiri princes and Kurangoth Nair.

After the conflicts, a treaty was signed. The British constructed a fort at Tellicherry with the help of the local rulers. The Company acquired the trade monopoly in pepper without paying any customs duty. However, they faced a menace from the French at Mahe, which led to a clash in 1725. Later, they had to conclude the rivalry in a peace treaty of 1728 as they lacked support from their respective governments to fight in North Malabar.

The functioning in the North was not an easy task for the British despite the peace restoration with the French. The British faced threats from the Dutch, who had possession of Fort St. Angelo at Cannanore. Both assisted the local chiefs in fighting against each other, and in return, they received trade monopolies. Later, the British acquired Dharmapatanam Island through treaties with the local rulers.

### 6.3.2 British Policy in Travancore

In Travancore, Anjengo was an important location that would be helpful for the British to connect the North through Kerala waters and further the development of their trade networks. Thus, they found Anjengo an ideal place to construct a factory and a fort. As per their request, Rani of Attingal permitted them to construct a factory in 1684 and a fort in 1690. The construction of the fort was completed in 1695. It became one of the earliest British settlements in Kerala. A military store depot was also set up there.

However, the British marketing

expansion at Anjengo incited the natives to an attack on the Anjengo factory. The root cause of the attack was the variations in the pepper price and the transformation of the fort into a military camp. Moreover, the company officials' corrupt practices increased hostilities between the indigenous elites and the British. A series of attacks took place between 1695 and 1721. On 15<sup>th</sup> April 1721, some of the local people at Anjengo murdered almost 140 British men under Gyfford, the Anjengo Chief factor, who were going to meet Rani of Attingal to gift her presents. Then, they attacked Anjengo fort and besieged it for six months. This revolt of 1721 is known as the **Attingal outbreak**, and its significance is that it was the first organised revolt against the British. Following the revolt, Rani of Attingal had to pay the compensation by allowing the Company to build a godown at any of her territorial premises. She also had to grant them a trade monopoly on pepper.

Subsequently, under Dr Alexander Orme, the Commander of Anjengo, the Company resolved a treaty with Travancore Prince Marthanda Varma in 1723. The treaty of 1723 was the first treaty to be signed between the Company and a Princely state in India. According to the treaty, the chief of Trippappur Swarupam agreed to bear the cost of constructing the Colachel fort and then offer it to the Company. In return, the Company supported the ruler overpowering the *Pillas* and the feudal chiefs. The Company also received permission from Rani of Attingal to build a factory at Edava. Marthanda Varma maintained cordial relations with the Company.

By 1795, the Travancore ruler accepted British supremacy. Thus, Col. Macaulay was posted as the British Resident in Travancore. In 1895, Velu Thampi Dalawa, then Travancore ruler, signed

a friendship treaty. With the treaty, Travancore officially became a subsidiary ally of the British and came to be under British protection.

### 6.3.3 Cochin under the British

In 1791, the ruler of Cochin signed a treaty with the Company agreeing to be a vassal and pay an annual tribute. In return, the Company promised to restore the territories of Cochin occupied by the Tipu. However, he was supposed to act according to the Company's instructions. Hence, the Cochin ruler became an ally to the Company. In 1800, the political control of Cochin was placed under the control of the Madras Government. The Company appointed Colonel Macaulay as British Resident in Travancore and Cochin. He started controlling the internal affairs of the principalities, which eventually led to the loss of the position of the Native rulers.

However, Cochin witnessed significant socio-economic and political changes during Saktan Tampuran's rule (1790-1805). He adopted the same strategy of Marthanda Varma towards the feudal elements and maintained a friendly relationship with the British. Saktan Tampuran played a pivotal role in the foundation of a centralised administrative system in Cochin. However, his death followed political instability and turmoil in Cochin. After Velu Thampi's revolt in Travancore, the Company took decisive actions against Cochin and Travancore, including the deportation of Paliyath Achan to Madras. Later, on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1809, Cochin became a subsidiary ally of the British.

In 1812, Colonel Munro was appointed as Diwan of Cochin. He introduced a police system (*Tannadars*) under *Tanna Nayaks*.



Fig 6.3.2 Saktan Tampuran

He established two subordinate courts at Trichur and Tripunithura. Munro also set up a Huzur court with appellate authority at Ernakulam. Further expansion of the judicial system, including the civil and criminal procedure code, was introduced during later Diwans of Cochin. An audit and accounts system was set up in Cochin to keep the accounts and the systematic collection of Land revenue and other state taxes. *Dewaswom* temples were placed under Government control. In the education sector, he established vernacular schools in every village. The vaccination system and western medicine were introduced later.



Fig 6.3.3 Col. Munro

### 6.3.4 British-French Relations

The first European powers to come to the Kerala coast were the Portuguese, Dutch, and later the British. The Danes were the next European power to reach Kerala, followed by the French. However, the Danes left the coast soon. The Portuguese, who were the first to come to the Kerala shores, faced a significant threat from the Dutch and confined themselves to Goa. The Dutch were overthrown by the British, but the French remained. The British won a significant victory against the French and restricted them to Pondicherry, Karaikkal, Mahe, Yanam and Chandanagore. Let us now look at the Anglo-French relations concerning the Kerala context.

The French Government formed a French East India company headquartered at Pondicherry in 1664 under Francois

Martin to perform mercantile activities. In 1667, Louis XIV sent an expedition under Francis Caron to trade in India. The French set up their first factory in Surat. Making Pondicherry their centre of commerce, they functioned in India. Mahe became their first French settlement in Kerala. On the Kerala coast, they built a factory at Calicut in 1701. They targeted the British in North Kerala for their political and economic interests, which resulted in Mayyazhi (Mahe) capture in 1725. The French fleet under M. de Pardaillan seized Mahe from the Kadathanad ruler.

The French maintained a close relationship with some of the local rulers of Kerala. Due to financial constraints, the Kadathanad ruler could not afford a long-term resistance against the French. Their next target was Tellicherry under the British. Hence, both the parties fought

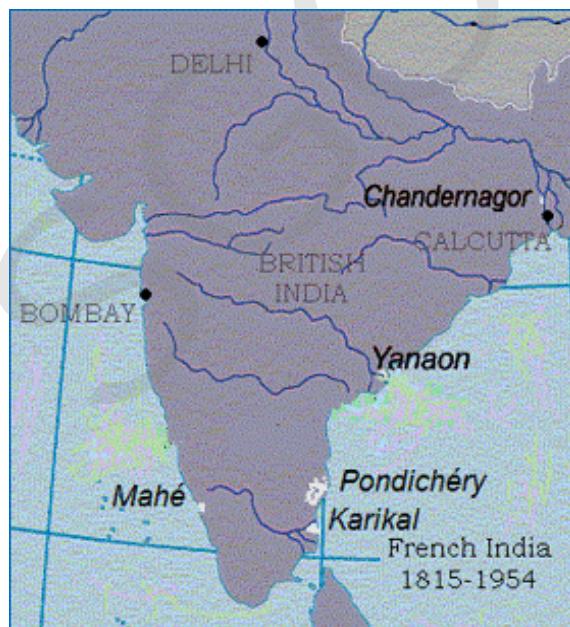


Fig 6.3.4 French in India (white portion)

against each other. The root cause of the Anglo-French rivalry was an attack of the British on Kurangoth Nair. He was a local chieftain who struggled to recover Tellicherry from the British. The French supported him. However, the parental

governments did not approve of the fights in North Malabar as they were in an amicable relationship in Europe during that time. Accordingly, the hostilities were resolved by a peace treaty in 1728. Both the groups agreed not to fight in India.

Nevertheless, they fought in Europe in 1744 and ceased fighting in North Kerala. The 1749 treaty of Aix-la- Chapelle concluded the war between the two powers, Europe and North Malabar. Later, the Seven Years War of Europe in October 1756 instigated the French and British to fight in India. Consequently, the French had to surrender Mahe to the British on 9<sup>th</sup>

February 1761. With the end of the war in Europe, the Treaty of Paris was signed on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1763. Mahe was returned to the French. Thus, French was confined to Mahe. Thus, the British East India Company gained control over Kerala and kept the native rulers under them through the treaties signed from time to time.

## Recap

- ◆ Captain Hawkins' Mission (1609) to Jahangir's court
- ◆ Captain Keeling and the Zamorin Treaty (1615)
- ◆ British expansion and fortifications
- ◆ Construction of Tellicherry fort
- ◆ Construction of Anjengo fort
- ◆ Attingal Outbreak (1721)
- ◆ Sakthan Thampuran and Cochin
- ◆ Anglo French rivalry
- ◆ Fall of Mahe

## Objective Questions

1. Who is known as the Vasco da Gama of Britain?
2. When was the British East India Company established?
3. Why did Captain William Hawkins visit Mughal Emperor Jahangir's court?
4. Who permitted the British to set up a factory at Anjengo?
5. When did the Attingal outbreak occur?
6. Which was the first treaty signed by the Company with a Princely state in India?
7. When did Travancore and Cochin accept British supremacy?
8. Who was Col. Macaulay?

9. When was the French East India Company founded?
10. Who led the French army in capturing Mahe from the Kadathanad ruler?
11. When did the French surrender Mahe to the British?
12. Which was the treaty responsible for the return of Mahe to the French by the British?

## Answers

1. Master Ralph-Fitch
2. 31st December 1600
3. To establish a factory at Surat
4. Rani of Attingal
5. 15th April 1721
6. Dr Alexander Orme's treaty with Marthanda Varma (1723)
7. 1795 and 1800
8. The first British Resident in Travancore and Cochin
9. 1664
10. M. de Pardaillan (1725)
11. 9th February 1761
12. The Treaty of Paris (10th February 1763)

## Assignments

1. Explain the emergence of Modern Travancore during the early British period in Kerala.
2. Examine the British strategy for expanding their trade network in Kerala during the 17th century.
3. Analyse the causes and consequences of the Attingal outbreak of 1721.
4. Explore the course of the Anglo-French rivalry in Kerala. Analyse the

- impact of the Carnatic Wars on French and British power relations in India.
5. Explain the socio-economic and political changes in Cochin during Saktan Tampuran's rule (1790-1805).

## Suggested Reading

1. Ibrahim Kunju,A.P., *Medieval Kerala*, International centre for Kerala Studies, University of Kerala, Kariavattom, 2007.
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2. Sharer, R. J. "Daily Life in Maya Civilization." Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009.



## Mysore Raids

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be :

- ◆ explain the political and economic circumstances that led to Mysorean intervention in Kerala
- ◆ analyse the social, political, and economic consequences of Mysorean occupation
- ◆ evaluate the administrative and revenue reforms introduced by Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan
- ◆ discuss the nature of British–Mysore relations and assess their impact on the political developments of Malabar

### Prerequisites

The Mysorean invasion of Malabar is considered to have taken place during a period of political instability in South India, marked by the weakening of major regional powers. Both the kingdoms of Mysore and Carnatic were experiencing internal turmoil, with factional rivalries and financial difficulties disrupting governance. In the Carnatic, Nawab Muhammad Ali was engaged in prolonged conflicts with the Poligars of Madura and Mysore, relying heavily on the support of the English East India Company, while simultaneously burdened by debts owed to the Company.

At the same time, the kingdom of Mysore was nominally ruled by Krishna Raja Wodeyar, though real authority rested with his powerful ministers, Devaraja and Nanjaraja. It was in this political setting that Hyder Ali, originally a soldier in the Mysorean army, rose to prominence through military skill and strategic acumen. As historian Ibrahim Kunju notes, Hyder Ali's abilities in both warfare and fiscal management helped him to seize power in 1761.

Ibrahim Kunju further observed that the political conditions in the South Indian states were 'confused and favourable', which created opportunities for any ambitious leader to expand their territorial influence. It was within this context of fragmented authority and regional rivalries that Hyder Ali directed Mysore's military campaigns into Malabar, setting the stage for crucial transformations in the political, economic, and social structures of the region.

Through this unit, let us discuss the causes, course, and consequences of the Mysore Raids in Kerala, and their place within the wider colonial and regional scenario of eighteenth-century South India.

## Keywords

Anglo-Mysore wars, British-Mysore relations, Revenue reforms, Mysore Occupation, Religious policy

## Discussion

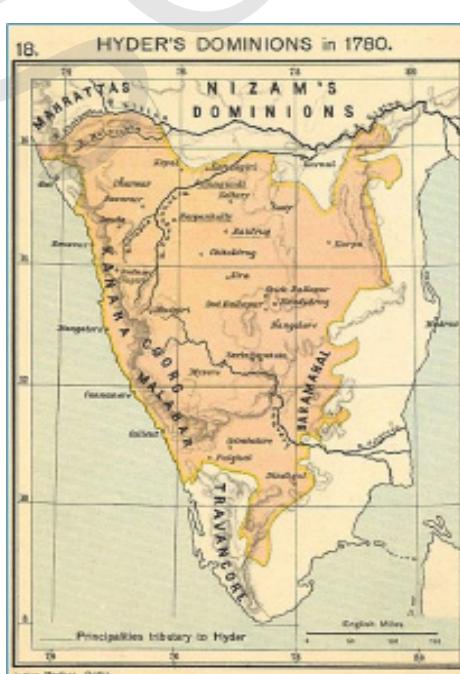
### 6.4.1 Kerala under Hyder Ali and Tipu

The rise of Mysore under Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan seriously threatened British supremacy. It eventually led to the Anglo- Mysore wars fought for 32 years, from 1767 to 1799. This period is marked by political tensions and economic strife

in Malabar.

The political conditions which favoured the Mysorean conquest of Malabar are the following:

- ◆ The continuous warfare among
- ◆ local rulers



◆ Fig 6.4.1 Hyder's dominions in 1780

- ◆ The acceptance of foreign support by the local rulers for their benefits
- ◆ The hostility of minor rulers towards Zamorin due to his expansionist policy
- ◆ The perpetual animosity between Ali Raja of Cannanore and the ruler of Kolathunad
- ◆ The inability of the five important chiefdoms of Kerala- Kolathunad, Kottayam, Kadathanad, Calicut and Palghat- to resist the invasion
- ◆ The rivalry between the British at Tellicherry and the French at Mahe.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, South India passed through a critical period. William Logan mentions the period from 1766 to 1792 in the history of South India as the 'Mysorean interlude' or 'Mysorean interregnum.' Historians like AP Ibrahim Kunju and C.K. Kareem identify the initial phase of the said period with the expeditions and rebellions during Hyder's campaign and the later stage with the consolidated activities of Tipu Sultan in the socio-economic sphere.

Hyder rose to the power of Mysore in 1761. He aimed to conquer and consolidate the entire South India and overthrow the British from the coast. Earlier in 1756-57, while he was still a *faujdar* of the Mysorean ruler, Hyder Ali had sent his brother-in-law on the invitation of the ruler of Palghat in the latter's fight against the Zamorin. Hyder was, therefore, familiar with the situations prevailing in Malabar as well as the potential of the region. As Mysore was 'landlocked', Bednore and Malabar were the options to access the coastal areas. In 1763, Hyder Ali conquered Bednore, the

neighbouring kingdom of Malabar. Later, Ali Raja of Cannanore, who was hostile with Kolathiri, instigated Hyder to invade Malabar. Thus, in February 1766, Hyder reached Malabar with 12000 troops. Ali Raja joined with Hyder along with 8000 soldiers. Hyder captured Chirakkal and Kottayam in North Kerala and entered Zamorin's territory.

Even though the Zamorin put up a stiff resistance, he could not stop the onslaught of Hyder. After sending his family to Ponnani, he surrendered. Hyder accepted him as a subordinate chief. A heavy defeat at the hands of the Mysoreans and the consequent insult of subordination was more than what the Zamorin could bear. Further, he was forced to agree to a huge compensation. Zamorin was aware of his inability to pay the war indemnity. Therefore, he set fire to his palace and self-immolated. In confirmation of the existing literature on Zamorin's fate during the Mysore intervention, a *grandavari* by Vella Nambutiri of the Panniyur faction mentions that Zamorin's failure to pay the promised money led to his suicide. Even though Hyder arranged other sources to collect the money, he emphasised that native rulers were responsible for the arrival of Hyder in Malabar and the conflicts that followed.

Due to the monsoon season, Hyder returned to Coimbatore after entrusting his officials to manage the administration. Knowing the news about the revolt in Kerala, Hyder returned and brutally suppressed it. He also decided to construct a fort at Palghat. Due to the continuous revolts, Hyder returned the conquered territories to the respective rulers and asked them to pay an annual tribute. In 1768, he withdrew from Kerala.

Since the local rulers broke the promise to pay the tributes (*Nazar*), the



Fig 6.4.2 Hyder Ali with French allies

infuriated Hyder Ali conducted his second expedition in 1773 under Srinivas Rao and Syed Sahib through the Coimbatore and Tamarasseri passes. The local powers, who were fighting among themselves, could not resist the unexpected entry of Hyder's troops. In 1774, he conquered Calicut completely. The Zamorin took refuge in Travancore. Hyder appointed Srinivasa Rao as Civil Governor and Sardar Khan as the Commander in chief. The Campaign on Malabar continued later. Following the demise of Hyder, Tipu Sultan succeeded and inaugurated a long series of battles against various principalities in the Malabar region. His master plan was to acquire the entire Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. However, Tipu could not fulfill his desire to conquer the entire Kerala. In the process, he had to encounter the British very seriously, which had several levels of repercussions.

#### 6.4.2 British-Mysore Relations

The Mysorean attempts to interfere in the affairs of the Malabar region brought them into direct conflict with the British. Mysore was already lined up with the French. On the other hand, Cochin and Travancore, the major princely states of Kerala, were lined up with the British. Moreover, the conflicts at the international

level affected the fate of Kerala as the French were involved in it. In the American War of Independence, France took the side of the American colonies, and the conflict spread to India as well. In August 1778, the French headquarters in Pondicherry was captured by the British. They planned to attack Mahe, which was the French stronghold in Malabar. Despite warnings from Hyder, the French could not defend Mahe from the British. It was captured on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1787.

The British feared a threat from Mysore as Hyder was friendly with the French. They decided to eliminate Mysorean domination over Western Coast. After all these conflicts, Hyder targeted Cochin and Travancore. He captured the Dutch strongholds of Chettuvai and Pappinivattom. Hyder was not on good terms with Travancore as they were strong British supporters on the Western Coast. They provided shelter to the rulers of Malabar and supplied resources to the British army to fight against Mysore. However, he could not attack Travancore due to the ongoing Mysore war. Later, in January 1782, the Mysore army surrendered to the British under Major Abington. Following this incident, Sardar Khan committed suicide. Thus, the Company overthrew the Mysorean army from Malabar and reinstated the old local



Fig 6.4.3 Tipu Sultan on an Elephant during fourth Anglo- Mysore war

chiefs to their positions. With this, the Mysorean force was confined to Palakkad.

Tipu took over the mission to reconquer Malabar according to his father's instruction and reached Malabar in 1782. Nevertheless, he had to rush back to Mysore after hearing of his father's demise on 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1782. The British hoped for a war of succession in Mysore and did not expect any threat from the Mysore side for the time being. They engaged in their conquest on the West and East coast. General Mathews succeeded in capturing Bednore and Mangalore. However, Tipu restored it without any delay and then signed a treaty with the British.

Breaching the rules and ignoring the warning of the Madras government, in 1783, Colonel Fullerton captured Palakkad fort and entrusted Zamorin to deal with the areas around the fort. Then, the next month, Colonel Macleod captured Cannanore fort and forced Bibi of Cannanore to sign a treaty with them. Due to the opposition from the Bombay Government, Macleod looted four lakh and some other provisions before surrendering the fort. Meantime, the second Anglo Mysore war concluded with the Treaty of Mangalore in 1784.

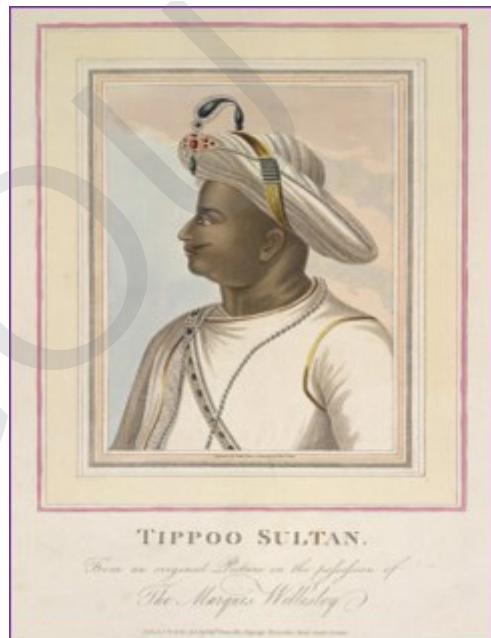


Fig 6.4.4 Tipu Sultan's portrait by Edward Orme

As per the treaty, Company transferred Malabar to Tipu and agreed that peace and friendship should occur between the Company and Tipu and between their allies. Thus, Mysore recovered Malabar again in their hands. Travancore and Tanjore remained as the allies of the British.

In between, Tipu's hostility towards the Travancore rulers piled up. On 15<sup>th</sup> April 1790, after a staunch fight with the

Travancore troops, Tipu attacked some parts of the Nedumkotta fort and captured Cranganore, Kuriyappalli, Ayakkotta, Alangad and Parur. However, Tipu could not continue to stay for long and returned on 24<sup>th</sup> March to Mysore due to the Monsoon and the anticipation of a British attack on Mysore.

The local rulers of the Malabar utilised the situation to unite themselves along with the British to defeat the Mysorean army. They decided to accept the British Suzerainty despite minor objections from rulers like Arakkal Bibi. Thus, the entire Malabar came under the supremacy of the British East India Company. The ruler of Cochin already accepted British suzerainty.

Mysorean forces withdrew from Kerala when the British troops entered Seringapatam in 1790. On 22nd September, Colonel Stuart captured the Palghat fort. Following this conquest, General Abercromby, the Bombay Governor, occupied Cannanore from Arakkal Bibi. The treaty of Seringapatam in 1792 brought the entire Malabar except for Wayanad under the British. Tipu transferred the entire Malabar, Cochin and Coorg to the British. Towards the end of the last Anglo-Mysore war, Seringapatam fell in 1799, and south Canara came under British control. Thus, Malabar and South Canara went under the direct control of the British, putting an end to the Mysorean domination in Kerala.

#### 6.4.3 Revenue Reforms of the Mysoreans

Revenue collection received top priority under the Mysorean rule. Since the State was continually at war, the military requirements could be fulfilled only through systematic and steady revenue collection. Therefore, it is no surprise that

the significant reforms introduced during the Mysorean occupation in Kerala were in the agrarian sector. Revenue settlement was made with the cultivators, and the tax was collected directly from the tenants.

Before the arrival of Mysoreans to Kerala, the *janmis* owned most of the land and collected the rent. As the ruler did not collect any tax, the *janmis* virtually enjoyed ownership of the land. Therefore, the ruler of the region did not have any rights on the land held by the *janmis*. The colonial writers estimated that 75% of the land was under private ownership. Rest was either the private property of rulers or the *dewaswom* lands. These categories of land were not taxed. The revenue reforms of Mysorean rulers are the following:

- ◆ Mysoreans imposed a systematic land revenue administration. The land revenue was imposed only on the wetlands. Initially, the drylands and *dewaswom* lands were exempted from taxes. Later, during Tipu's rule in Malabar, *dewaswom* land was also included in the category of land to be taxed.
- ◆ Before the advent of Mysoreans, the land measurement was calculated according to the seed capacity of the land. Then, the Mysoreans introduced a land revenue system based on the actual production of the land.
- ◆ Under Madanna, the civil governor, cultivable land was surveyed and measured according to its productivity during Hyder's reign. Then, the land revenue was fixed according to the actual productivity of the land.
- ◆ It was for the time that this

kind of survey and assessment of land tax had taken place in Kerala.

- ◆ The revenue settlement was directly made with the tenants, *kanakkars* or *kudiyans*. The revenue was deducted from the share due to the *janmis*. It led to the weakening of the feudal aristocracy. Moreover, it had taken the tax burden away from the shoulders of the actual cultivators.
- ◆ After the Treaty of Mangalore in 1784, Tipu entrusted Arshad Beg Khan with revenue collection and agrarian reforms. Tipu encouraged the peasants and offered rent-free concessions and other incentives. Moreover, he relaxed the tax collection if there was any failure of the crops.
- ◆ The Mysorean sultans sorted out the complaints or grievances of the peasants to an extent.
- ◆ In 1786, the Tipu sultan separated the civil and military functions of the Government to prevent corruption and improve the efficiency of the revenue administration. As a result, Mir Ibrahim was appointed as the governor of the civil administration and Arshad Beg Khan was entrusted with military functions.
- ◆ Surveys were reconducted to assess and rectify any fault or irregularities in the first survey.
- ◆ The unauthorised land was brought under taxation to prevent the illegal possession

of the land. The new agrarian policy shook the feudal set-up of the society. The new system of revenue settlement eliminated the intermediaries between the cultivator and the Government.

- ◆ In addition to the above developments, sandal and cardamom were state monopolies.

#### 6.4.4 Religious Policy

It is often argued that the administrative reforms can be discussed only with their religious policy. However, the native population found the religious conversions and reforms as an encroachment on the freedom of the society. The land surveys and the land taxation were viewed as a threat to the caste privileges of the upper caste. The social reforms like covering the breasts of women challenged Hindu customs. They considered it a blow to their religious traditions since it is a Muslim custom to cover the upper part of the body. The changes in marriage and inheritance also provoked the native population. The British effectively used this religious sentiment to organise them against the Tipu. Some of the prisoners were converted. The aristocracy who rebelled against Tipu was suppressed, and the natives characterised it as a religious crusade. As most feudal landlords were non-Muslims, the socio-economic reforms were alleged to be expressions of the religious bigotry of Tipu.

Nevertheless, allegations of fanaticism have been contested by certain historians. The majority of Tipu's officials, revenue collectors and writers were Hindus. They also held several higher posts in Tipu's administration, including army and civil service. Furthermore, some of the religious and learning institutions of

Hindus, temples and ceremonies received financial support from Tipu. However, the religious policies followed by Tipu remain controversial in the pages of Kerala history.

#### 6.4.5 Effects of the Mysore Invasion

The effects of the ‘Mysore interlude’ has been perceived as a significant landmark in the history of Kerala. According to P K K Menon, the Malabar unified its political control, reorganised and restructured its land revenue system of administration, adopted a new coinage system and enhanced their means of communication. K.M. Panikkar focused on the emergence of a ‘new middle-class society’ from the shackles of the existing societal order. Sreedhara Menon thinks the Mysorean interlude ‘marked the end of medievalism and opened an era of modern and progressive ideas.’



Fig 6.4.5 Palakkad fort

In addition to the reforms in revenue administration, other initiatives that brought about significant changes in Malabar are given below.

- ◆ Extensive construction of tanks and wells throughout the territories
- ◆ Establishment of warehouses at Vadakara, Koyilandy, Calicut and a trading company at Malabar

- ◆ Set up trade centres at Muscat and Jeddah

- ◆ A network of roads was constructed. e.g., Sulthanbathery- Calicut Road, Cannanore-Mysore Road, Malappuram- Thamarassery road, Feroke- Coimbatore road, Chaliyam- Chettuvai road

- ◆ Employment and payment of salary to the workers in state undertakings for the first time in Kerala history

- ◆ Construction of Palakkad fort

- ◆ Creation of Farrukhabad

- ◆ Introduction of a new coinage system.

Generally, a centralised form of Government has replaced the traditional feudal system of administration. The upper caste sections of the society suffered serious reverses during this period. Nairs and Namboothiris lost their dominant place in society. Some of them sold their lands to Mappilas and left for Travancore. Several Nair women were declared as lower castes and sold as slaves. Some of the High-class Hindus were converted to Islam. Lower-class people became conscious and aware of their dignity and status in society. As there was a great emphasis on ‘purity’, ‘chastity’, ‘simplicity’ and ‘morality in life’, women were prohibited from doing domestic work as servants.

Moreover, Tipu advised the people to cover their delicate body parts and ordered them to wear a headcover and a robe while they went out. For instance, Tipu advised the headman of the ‘Malai Kondigar’ tribe in Malabar, who went out naked, to inform their men and women to dress up. Polyandry and intoxicants were prohibited during the Mysore rule in Malabar.

The Mysorean epoch in Kerala is one of the most controversial periods in the history of South India. To an extent, the Mysoreans altered the entire structure of the Malabar society. Some colonial historians observe that the territories under Mysore registered economic prosperity and progress. Historians like Sir John Shore and James Mill remarked that the Mysore-dominated areas were 'protected', 'best cultivated and the labourers were encouraged and rewarded.' Dodwell emphasised the well-being and the 'progress' achieved in Tipu's territory.

The colonial writings describe Tipu Sultan as a 'religious bigot', and the Mysorean period was marked by 'tyranny'. The replication of this image is found in Francis Buchanan's travel accounts and William Logan's Malabar Manual. However, some modern historians of Kerala argue that the Mysorean invasion badly affected Malabar. K. M. Panikkar

was highly critical of the plundering of the gold and treasures during the Mysorean occupation. Sreedhara Menon talks about the destruction and ruining of the towns during the Mysore invasion. He says that the country's economy was adversely affected and took years to recover. When trade and commerce were severely affected, it led to an economic depression. Innes blames Tipu for the serious harm caused to the Pepper vines and the South Malabar spice trade. M.G.S Narayanan presents the argument that Tipu's policies resulted in the retrogress of Malabar. It planted the seeds of enmity between Hindus and Muslims. Scholars like A.P Ibrahim Kunju and C.K. Kareem followed a different line. They emphasised the role of Mysorean rulers in the restructuring of Malabar, including the reforms in the rural sector, transportation sector, and other spheres of economic activity.

## Recap

- ◆ The socio-political condition of Malabar on the arrival of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan
- ◆ Hyder's entry to Malabar
- ◆ Tipu's early conquests in Kerala
- ◆ Mysore- French relation
- ◆ The British relationship with Mysore
- ◆ Land revenue settlement during the Mysore occupation
- ◆ The Treaty of Seringapatam and the eventual British control over Malabar
- ◆ The religious policy of Tipu
- ◆ Economic reforms in Kerala under Mysorean rulers

- ◆ Impact of Mysorean invasion
- ◆ Political unification and restructuring of Malabar
- ◆ Centralised governance replacing feudal administration

## Objective Questions

1. Who mentions the period from 1766 to 1792 in the history of South India as 'Mysorean interlude' or 'Mysorean interregnum'?
2. Who were the two major Mysore rulers who invaded Malabar in the eighteenth century?
3. What was the immediate reason behind the Mysore invasion of Malabar?
4. When did the first Kerala campaign of Hyder happen?
5. Which were the French headquarters in India?
6. When did the capture of Mahe happen?
7. When was the Treaty of Seringapatam signed between Tipu and the British?
8. Which were the areas Tipu formally surrendered to the British?

## Answers

1. William Logan
2. Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan
3. To access the Malabar port and to eliminate the British from the western Coast
4. 1766
5. Pondicherry
6. 19th March 1787

7. 18th March 1792
8. Malabar, Coorg, Cochin except for Wayanad

## Assignments

1. Discuss the circumstances that led to the Mysorean invasion of Malabar.
2. Analyse the strategic alliance between Mysore and the French during the 18th century.
3. Examine the consequences of the Mysorean interlude on the society, polity, economy, and culture of Kerala.
4. Examine the socio-economic impacts of the Anglo-Mysore wars on the Malabar region. How did the wars alter the administrative and land revenue systems?
5. Analyse the religious policies of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan and their effects on Kerala society.

## Suggested Reading

1. Cherian, P.J.(Ed.), *Perspectives of Kerala History*, Kerala State Gazetteers Department, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999.
2. Ibrahim Kunju, A.P., *Medieval Kerala*, International centre for Kerala Studies, University of Kerala, Kariavattom, 2007.
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SGOU





# UNIT

## Kerala Under The British

### Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be:

- ◆ explain the processes through which the British East India Company consolidated its supremacy over Kerala
- ◆ analyse the administrative systems and governance practices introduced by the British in Kerala during the eighteenth century
- ◆ examine the significant treaties concluded between the British and the major chiefdoms of Kerala
- ◆ assess the long-term impact of the treaties on the polity of the region

### Prerequisites

As discussed in the previous unit, the British East India Company faced considerable challenges during the Mysorean interlude. The successive campaigns led by Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan in the latter half of the eighteenth century altered the course of Kerala history. Their principal aim was considered to dismantle British influence in Southern India by seizing control of Malabar, which was a strategic region for British trade, especially in the export of spices and import of military supplies.

Malabar's commercial and military importance made Hyder Ali launch the Kerala campaign in 1766, followed by a wave of local uprisings. His second expedition culminated in direct confrontation with the British at Tellicherry in 1773. The conclusion of the American War of Independence witnessed the British capturing Mahe and Pondicherry, which were then under French control. The British perceived the Mysorean alliance with the French as a substantial threat to their interests on the western coast of India.

The ascension of Tipu Sultan further intensified Anglo-Mysorean tensions. The British East India Company aligned itself with the local rulers and chieftains of Kerala against Mysorean dominance. This protracted conflict ended with the signing of the Treaty of Seringapatam on 18 March 1792, whereby Tipu Sultan ceded Malabar, Coorg, and Cochin, excluding Wayanad, to the British.

In this unit, let us explore the subsequent phase of British expansion and administrative consolidation in Kerala, and the political, social, and economic transformations that followed.

## Keywords

British supremacy, Administrative changes, Malabar, Treaty of Mavelikkara, Treaty with Travancore and Cochin

## Discussion

### 6.5.1 British Supremacy over Kerala

In Unit 3 of Block 6, we discussed the details of the formation of the British East India Company. The British East India Company was the Company of merchants. Their primary aim was to trade with the East. When they reached the Kerala shores, they realised that the political atmosphere of the region was favourable for them to intervene. Hence, they tried to win over some local rulers by providing arms and ammunition in their battles against each other and providing men who would guard their forts.

The Company supplied guns, lead, and gunpowder to Marthanda Varma in his fight against Quilon and Kayamkulam, whom the Dutch assisted. The gunners provided by the British could defend Travancore forts. Later in 1741, in the Battle of Colachel, Marthanda Varma defeated the Dutch. The British then approached Marthanda Varma for spices. However, Travancore signed the Treaty of

Mavelikkara with the Dutch in 1755. This treaty was a blow to the British hopes in Travancore.

Moreover, Marthanda Varma intended to remain open to spice trade with the Company and other dealers. In 1743, he brought pepper and other spices under state monopoly and set up godowns to collect these articles. Despite the protests, he ordered punishment for those who disobeyed the rules related to the spice trade.

The last two units discussed the early settlement of the British in various parts of Kerala and the Mysore invasion of Malabar. During Tipu's Campaign, Malabar rulers and local chieftains disintegrated in various places. At the same time, the local people began depending on the British for their judicial and political needs. The British took it as an opportunity. The British East India Company initiated the process to fix and collect the annual tax through agreements with local chieftains and landlords. By this time, the local rulers and landlords who escaped to Travancore



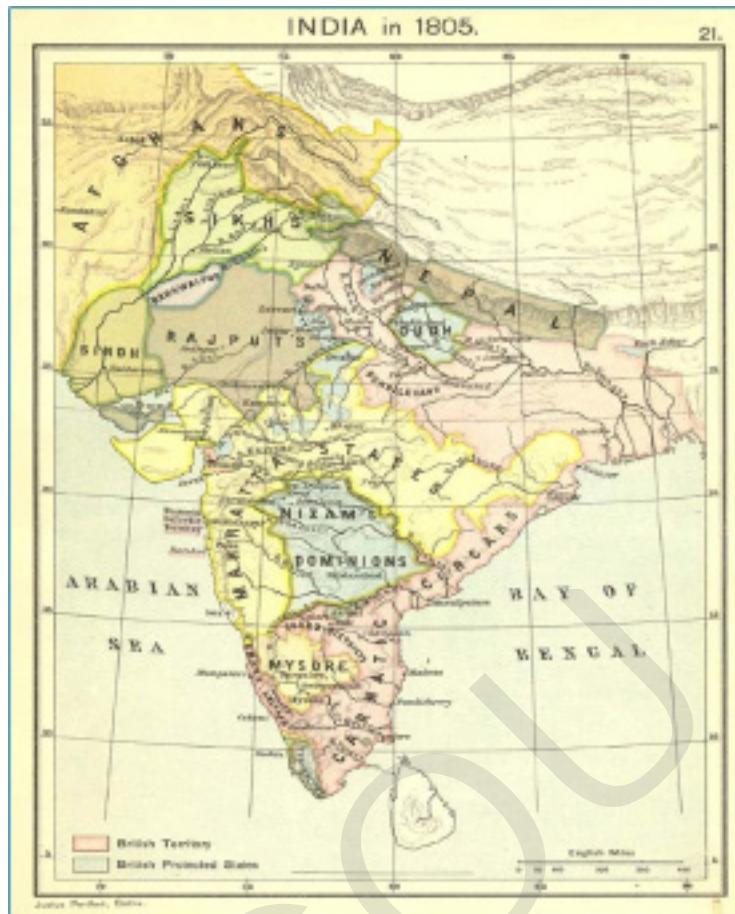


Fig 6.5.1 India in 1805

were trying to restore their lost positions. The Company permitted the landlords to collect revenue. These circumstances led to the oppression of peasants and, in turn, led to revolts by the Mappilas, who were mainly peasants in Malabar. As a result, towards the end of the eighteenth century, Malabar came to be entirely under British supremacy.

Meanwhile, Travancore and Cochin were on good terms with the British. As mentioned in the previous units, by the 1800s, after the Mysore invasion, Travancore and Cochin came under Company's control. Travancore signed a treaty with the Company in 1795. Thus, political control and the pepper trade of the region came under the Company. A forceful treaty of 1805 ended the political Independence of the kingdom. King was

reduced to a symbolic power, and States' status was reduced to vassalage. Thus, they prepared the ground to be colonised by the British.

## 6.5.2 Administrative Changes in Malabar

During the Mysore invasion, the Hindu landlords left their land behind and fled to Travancore, seeking refuge. In the meantime, the Mappila peasants began cultivating those agrarian land and paid revenue to the Mysore rulers. With the signing of the Seringapatam treaty on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1792, Malabar came under British control, and the landlords returned to Malabar. The Company helped them to regain their position.

The Company appointed a joint

commission to study the conditions prevailing in Malabar and prepare a plan for its administration. They ensured a fixed annual revenue payment from local rulers per definite agreements. They entrusted them with the right to collect revenue. However, they tactfully used force to suppress the peasants by extracting a high rent rate. One of the causes of the latter's persecution is that they helped the Mysore rulers in their battles against the British. This led to minor clashes by the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, some historians view such struggles as instances of 'resistance'.

Moreover, Peasants refused to pay taxes to the landlords. The continuous uprisings made the circumstances necessary for the Company to control the administration of Malabar directly. Hence, Malabar came under the direct rule of the British East India Company in the 1800s.

After taking control of Malabar, Cochin and Travancore, the Company could not administer these places straight away. Sreedhara Menon held the view that the British could not establish their administration conveniently right after the accession. The Company could not fulfil the specific promises given to the local rulers. Cornwallis had discussions with them regarding their restoration after Tipu's withdrawal from Kerala.

General Abercromby, the Bombay Governor, was assigned to negotiate with the local rulers on the annual revenue collection and the interim administration of the newly acquired territories in Malabar. As per his recommendation, Farmer and Major Dow were appointed as commissioners to convince the local rulers to pay a fixed annual tariff and obey their control over them. They were entitled to settle the political atmosphere of Malabar, mainly the administration and revenue

collection from local powers, including Zamorin and the ruler of Chirakkal. As per the new agreement they made with the local chiefs, the latter was supposed to pay a fixed tribute to Company for a year initially and later renewed for five years each. The local authorities had to exercise their power only under the control of the Company. As Sreedhara Menon remarked, with time, Joint commissioners emerged as a new administrative system of Malabar.

In December 1792, Jonathan Duncan and Charles Boddam were appointed joint commissioners. They allowed the locals to trade all goods except pepper, as it was one commodity that became the Company's monopoly. In the same year slave trade was prohibited. They signed separate agreements with the local rulers and settled their claims and allowances, *Malikhanas*. In March 1793, Malabar was divided into northern and southern divisions, with Tellicherry and Cherpulassery as their headquarters. A superintendent controlled each division. A supervisor and chief Magistrate were deputed to be in-charge of the entire Malabar and the superintendents. The supervisor office is headquartered in Calicut. However, the office was later joined with a commission. The commission was assigned for the inquiries related to a dispute between Zamorin and the last supervisor.

Later, on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1800, Malabar province was separated from the Bombay presidency and kept under the control of the Madras presidency. Meantime, the role of commissioners was concluded. Then a Principal Collector and nine subordinate collectors were given the charge of administration. On 1<sup>st</sup> October 1801, Major McLeod was appointed Principal Collector of the Malabar district. Thus, the Malabar district became a distinct administrative unit of the Madras presidency.



### 6.5.3 Treaty with Travancore and Cochin

Meanwhile, in Travancore, the East India Company demanded that the ruler of Travancore pay the entire war expenditure. In 1795, during the period of Dharma Raja, the successor of Marthanda Varma, Travancore accepted British supremacy by signing a treaty. In return, what Travancore received was the promise of help from the British during the attack from any external force. At the administrative level, Macaulay was appointed as Resident and representative of the Company in Travancore. Meanwhile, in the 1800s, the Prime Minister or Dalawa of Travancore was Velu Thampi. However, the Resident interfered in the matters of Travancore, creating conflicts between both. He led a revolt against the group of people who controlled the administration by taking advantage of the weakness of the then ruler, Balarama Varma. They illegally grabbed money from the people. Moreover, Macaulay helped the enemy of Paliyath Achan, Dalawa of Cochin. Hence, Velu Thampi and Paliyath Achan fought against the British and defeated them.



Fig 6.5.2 Col. Macaulay (Artist - John Smart)

With a treaty signed in 1805 by

Balarama Varma, Travancore became a subsidiary ally of the British East India Company and came under British protection. The tribute of Travancore was fixed to 8,00,000 rupees per annum. Thus, the British could interfere directly in the internal matters of Travancore and advise the ruler in the internal administration of the State. At last, with the treaty signed by Velu Thampi Dalawa, Travancore lost its political freedom to the British. In 1810, Colonel Munro was appointed the new Diwan of Travancore by the then Rani of Travancore, Gauri Lakshmi Bai. Thus, Munro became both Resident and Diwan of Travancore and Cochin. With this, the British had the upper hand in the affairs of both states.



Fig 6.5.3 Velu Thampi Dalawa

In August 1790, Cochin gave up allegiance to Mysore and became the tributary to the British East India Company. The Company signed a treaty on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1791, and Cochin became a vassal to Company. In Cochin, the British promised the ruler to recover the territories captured by Tipu back to him. Moreover, Cochin ruler Rama Varma would be in full possession of those territories. Like Malabar, the Cochin ruler was also entitled

to pay annual tribute to the Company and work under the Company's direction. In return, Cochin was provided with the protection of the Company as a faithful ally. Later in 1800, Cochin was also placed

under Madras Government and thus under British control. Meantime, the entirety of Kerala came under the political power of the British East India Company.

## Recap

- ◆ British East India Company in Kerala
- ◆ Arrived for trade, exploited local political rivalries
- ◆ Company supported Marthanda Varma against Dutch, sought pepper trade
- ◆ Interim administration of English in Malabar after Treaty of Seringapatam.
- ◆ Malabar Administration Changes
- ◆ Joint commissions, revenue collection reforms, peasant revolt
- ◆ The British relationship with Travancore, Cochin and Malabar
- ◆ Treaty with Travancore and Cochin
- ◆ Travancore signed treaties reducing political autonomy
- ◆ Cochin became a tributary state under British protection
- ◆ Shift from local autonomy to British suzerainty
- ◆ Integration into Madras Presidency, administrative restructuring

## Objective Questions

1. Who was appointed as the first commissioners of Malabar?
2. In which year the slave trade was prohibited?
3. When was Malabar divided into two administrative divisions?
4. When did the control of Malabar province shift from Bombay presidency to

Madras presidency?

5. Who was appointed as the first Principal Collector of the Malabar district?
6. Who was the first British Resident and representative of the Company in Travancore?
7. Which treaty made Travancore a subsidiary ally of the British East India Company?
8. What was the amount of tribute fixed for Travancore to pay the British?
9. Who was assigned with the duty of both Resident and Diwan of Travancore and Cochin?
10. Which treaty made Cochin a vassal to the Company?
11. Which year was Cochin placed under the Madras Government?

## Answers

1. Farmer and Major Dow
2. 1792
3. March 1793
4. 21st May 1800
5. Major McLeod
6. Macaulay
7. 1805 treaty by Balarama Varma
8. 8,00,000 rupees per annum
9. Col. Munro
10. Treaty of 1791
11. 1800

## Assignments

1. Explain the administrative changes introduced by the British in Malabar after gaining control in the 18th century.
2. Compare the approaches of Marthanda Varma and subsequent rulers towards European powers in Kerala.
3. Analyse the nature of the treaties signed between the British and Kerala and assess its impact on the latter's society, economy and polity.
4. Discuss the socio-economic impact of British domination on Malabar.

## Suggested Reading

1. Ibrahim Kunju, A.P., *Medieval Kerala*, International centre for Kerala Studies, University of Kerala, Kariavattom, 2007.
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QP CODE: .....

Reg. No: .....

Name : .....

Third SEMESTER B.A (Hons.) HISTORY EXAMINATION  
MAJOR DISCIPLINE CORE - SGB24HS203MC- HISTORY OF KERALA-I  
(PRE-MODERN PHASE)  
2024-25 - Admission Onwards  
**MODEL QUESTION PAPER - SET A**

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

## SECTION A

*Answer any eight questions of the following. Each question carries one mark.*

$(08 \times 1 = 8 \text{ Marks})$

1. Which treaty brought Travancore under the subsidiary alliance system of the British East India Company?
2. Name the scholar who wrote *Laghubhaskariyavyakhyā*, a commentary on Bhaskara's mathematical text.
3. Which ruler of Venad earned the title 'Sangramadhira' for his military achievements?
4. Who is widely regarded as the founding figure of Indian prehistoric studies?
5. By what other name is the Bharathapuzha River known in historical sources?
6. Who authored the influential historical study *Perumals of Kerala*?
7. Identify the capital city associated with the Perumal dynasty in early Kerala.
8. In the administrative structure of medieval Kerala, who was known as the 'Koyiladhikari'?
9. Who is the author of the feminist historical essay *Kulastreeyum Chantapennum Undayathenganne*?
10. What luxury goods, exported from South India, were referred to by the Romans as *Yavanapriya*?

## SECTION B

*Answer any six questions of the following. Each question carries two marks.*

$(06 \times 2 = 12 \text{ Marks})$

11. What is *Sanketam* in the context of temple land management?
12. Define the term *Adiyayma* in Kerala's social hierarchy.
13. What does the term *Ur* signify in early Kerala village organisation?
14. What is the historical importance of the *Mushakavamsa Kavya*?

15. Who were the *Nurruvar* and what roles did they play in society?
16. What are Petroglyphs, and where are they found in Kerala?
17. Define *Manipravalam Literature* with one example.
18. What is *Muziris* known for in ancient trade history?

### SECTION C

*Write short notes on any **six** questions of the following.  
Each question carries **five** marks.*

**(06 × 5 = 30 Marks)**

19. How have women writers helped reshape the history of gender and society in Kerala?
20. Analyse the role of Kunjali Marakkars in resisting Portuguese power in Kerala.
21. What are the different types of Megalithic monuments found in Kerala?
22. Discuss how rivers contributed to Kerala's political, industrial, and trade landscape.
23. Explain the cultural and environmental significance of *Tinai* in ancient Tamilakam.
24. Discuss Rajan Gurukkal's interpretation of Indo-Roman trade in Kerala.
25. What is the archaeological significance of the Pattanam excavation?
26. Describe the functions of the *Swaroopams* in the political structure of medieval Kerala.

### SECTION D

*Answer any **two** questions of the following. Each question carries **ten** marks.*

**(2×10 =20 Marks)**

27. Examine Kerala's trade relations with foreign regions during the early historical period. How did this shape its economy and culture?
28. Analyse the evolution and expansion of the caste system in Kerala. What were its socio-political consequences?
29. Evaluate the revenue reforms introduced by the Mysorean rulers in Malabar.
30. Assess how colonial historiography shaped Kerala's historical narratives and the challenges posed by post-colonial historians.



QP CODE: .....

Reg. No: .....

Name : .....

Third SEMESTER B.A (Hons.) HISTORY EXAMINATION  
MAJOR DISCIPLINE CORE - SGB24HS203MC- HISTORY OF KERALA-I  
(PRE-MODERN PHASE)  
2024-25 - Admission Onwards  
**MODEL QUESTION PAPER - SET B**

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

## SECTION A

*Answer any **eight** questions of the following. Each question carries **one** mark.*  
 $(08 \times 1 = 8 \text{ Marks})$

1. Who wrote *Laghubhaskariyavyakhya*, a notable mathematical text from medieval Kerala?
2. *Pathittupattu* is a Sangam literary work celebrating the Chera rulers. What is its structure?
3. Who is the author of *Tuhfat-al-Mujahiddin*, an early historical text on Kerala's resistance to Portuguese rule?
4. Name the historian who compiled the *Cochin State Manual* in the early 20th century.
5. Which work by E.M.S. Namboothiripad applies Marxist theory and historical materialism to the study of Kerala's past?
6. Identify the Sangam-era kingdom known for maintaining an efficient navy for overseas expeditions.
7. Which geographical pass facilitated trade between Kerala and Tamil Nadu, especially during the Roman period?
8. What are the two major sects or paths associated with the South Indian Bhakti movement?
9. Which ancient Kerala port, identified as a trade centre by Pliny and the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, played a major role in Indo-Roman commerce?
10. What was the 1741 event that marked the defeat of the Dutch by Travancore forces?

## SECTION B

*Answer any **six** questions of the following. Each question carries **two** marks.*  
 $(06 \times 2 = 12 \text{ Marks})$

11. Define *Hero Stones* and explain their role in understanding Kerala's warrior culture.
12. What is *Keralolpathi*, and how does it present the origin of Kerala?

13. What are *Petroglyphs*? Give one example from Kerala.
14. State the historical context of the *Mushakavamsa Kavya*.
15. Explain the term *Aintinai* with reference to Sangam literature.
16. What is *Smarthavicharam* and who were subjected to it?
17. Briefly describe the *Cartaz system* introduced by the Portuguese.
18. What was the importance of the *Mamamkam* festival?

### SECTION C

*Write a short note on any six questions of the following.*

*Each question carries five marks.*

$(06 \times 5 = 30 \text{ Marks})$

19. Apply your understanding of maritime trade to explain the role of Muziris in Indo-Roman commerce.
20. Analyse how the Palakkad Gap influenced cultural and political exchanges in Kerala's history.
21. Examine the historical role of *Nurruvars* in Kerala's temple-centric social order.
22. Compare the approaches of Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai and M.G.S. Narayanan in reconstructing early Kerala history.
23. Identify the contributions of West Asian settlers in shaping Kerala's trade and religious life.
24. Analyse the impact of Portuguese religious policies on Kerala's local communities and church practices.
25. How does epigraphy help historians reconstruct the political and economic history of medieval Kerala?
26. Trace the development of Malayalam literature in relation to changes in society and language.

### SECTION D

*Answer any two questions of the following. Each question carries ten marks.*

$(2 \times 10 = 20 \text{ Marks})$

27. Critically evaluate the historical value of *Mushakavamsa Kavya*, *Keralolpathi*, and *Tuhfat-al-Mujahidin* in understanding Kerala's past.
28. Discuss the social and economic effects of the *Marumakkathayam* system on the Nair community. How do historians explain its origins?
29. Assess how the political structure of Tamilakam during the Sangam age shaped early South Indian polity.
30. Evaluate the long-term effects of the Mysorean invasions on Kerala's society, economy, and religious institutions.

## സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യയാൽ സ്വത്രതരാകണം  
വിശ്വപ്രതരഥയി മാറണം  
ഗഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം  
സുരൂപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

കൂദിരുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു തെങ്ങങ്ങളെ  
സുരൂവീമിയിൽ തെളിക്കണും  
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണും  
നീതിവെജയയന്തി പാറണും

ശാസ്ത്രവ്യാപ്തിയെന്നുമേകണും  
ജാതിദേവമാകു മാറണും  
ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ  
അതാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജൂലിക്കണേ

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# History of Kerala-I

## (Pre-modern Phase)

COURSE CODE: SGB24HS203MC



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