CHAPTER I

GEO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CALICUT

The physiography of the kingdom of the Zamorins had determined its place in the commercial history of the world. Its physical features and products attracted the affections of merchants, traders, business men, mariners, adventurers and religious missionaries from various far-off lands. It is a truisum that geography and topography govern history. Its impact could be felt on the political, socio-economic, religious and cultural history of any people. Geography too moulds the character and temper of the people. It also decides the occupations and engagements of them and their consequent way of life. A country’s mountains and rivers, its climate and natural resources largely determine the nature of the social and economic life of its people. The choice of occupation on the part of individuals, their physical and mental efficiency, their standard of life as well as their social customs and institutions bear the imprint of the geographical features of the land in which they live.

During the early history, the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas ruled Tamilakam in their respective regions and their citizens. The Arabs called the southern region of India including the Chera Empire as Ma’bar. Political history of the Cheras, as per the available sources, dawned on the Western Coast only with Imayavaramban Nedunjeralathan and Cheran Senguttuvan. At this time, it comprised the major portions


of Tamilakam, sometimes including certain portions of Mysore as well. Besides this, the present South Malabar and Cochin too came under the boundaries of the Cheras. The Cheras were the lords of ‘elephants’ and ‘coconut’ and black gold (pepper) groves, and their territories therefore came to be called Cheramandalam. Mahodayapuram, the capital of Perumals or the later Cheras, occupied a pre-eminent place in the history of medieval times and it was from here that the later Cheras ruled till the early part of the twelfth century A.D. In course of time, the Malabar area was split into many petty kingdoms. Among them, that of the Zamorins of Calicut emerged as a powerful one. The Zamorins subdued the neighbouring powers like Nedunganadu, Cochin, Tirunavai, and Nilambur and thus earned the enmity of these neighbours.

Location and Extent:

Calicut is now a land of the Malayalam-speaking people. The city is situated on the right bank of the river Kallayi at its mouth adjoining it and not marked off by any natural boundaries. It stretched into the fertile hinterland of Polanadu and linked to Ernadu, cut-off from the sea by the kingdom of Valluvanadu, the territory seems to have been named after Valluvar the renowned author of Thirukkural, Wayanadu,

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5 C. Achyutha Menon, Cochin State Manual, Ernakulam, 1911, p.31.
6 Earlier, Calicut was also a Tamil – speaking region. Malayalam, emerged as a separate language after the 9th century A.D.
7 Ernadu is a separate taluk that consisted of Vajerry, Edookoor, Nandoor, Killimoorg, Karikadu, Iryelly, Chezana, Nediripoo and Eready.
Vayal + Nadu – “Paddy fields”, Vettuvanadu, the land of the Vettuvar, a tribal people and Parappanadu the vast expanse. At present, Calicut is a separate District of the State of Kerala, situated on the south-west Coast of India. The District is bounded on the north by the Tellicherry taluk of Kannur District. Its name in the Sangam age was Naravu or Nauroz\(^8\) (Cannanore) and Mysore, on the east by Mananthavady and Vythiri taluks of Wayanadu District, near Mysore and Nilgiris, on the south by Ernadu and Tirur taluks of the Malappuram District and on the west by the Arabian Sea\(^9\). The Wayanadu hills and the towering peaks of Nilgiris form the eastern boundary of Calicut.

Before the formation of linguistic states on 1\(^{st}\) November 1956, the erstwhile Malabar was a part of the province of Madras\(^10\). The modern Calicut District (Kozhicode or Kallikkottai) came into being on 1\(^{st}\) January 1957. The District lies between 10°47’ and 11°52’ in the north latitude and between 75°32’ and 76°33’ in the east longitude\(^11\). It covers an area of 2344 square kms, which indicates 6.03 per cent of the total area of the state\(^12\). During the reign of the Zamorins, Calicut attained its zenith and continued to be the capital of the Zamorins.

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\(^10\) *Dinamalar*, (Tamil daily newspaper), dated 1\(^{st}\) November, Trivandrum, 1956, p.1.


\(^12\) S.C. Bhatt, *The Encyclopaedia District Gazetteers of India*, New Delhi, 1997, p.800.
Origin of the term Kozhicode (Calicut):

In the medieval times, during the 10th, 11th and the succeeding centuries A.D., the Zamorins ruled a part, namely the Nediyeruppu Swarupam, of northern Kerala of the Cheraman Perumal Empire. After the dismemberment of the Chera Empire during the last days of the Perumals, the powerful rulers of north Kerala subjugated the petty rulers of the north13. Since then, ancient Kerala has been partitioned among the three rulers, the Zamorin of Calicut, the Raja of Cochin and the MahaRaja of Travancore. As said earlier, the term rose from the Tamil terms Koil (temple) and Kotha (fort). The term Zamorin, was derived from the Malayalam word Samutiri, abbreviated into Samuri, which is derived from the Malayalam word Swami-Sri, “the Lordmaster”.14 It is interesting to compare the term Samuri with the term Samurai of Japan. Both the terms, Samuri and Samurai refer to military chiefs related to Sea, ship and merchandise. The Zamorins, the hereditary rulers of this kingdom, soon developed Calicut into a major sea-port on the Kerala Coast. The evidences cited above clearly indicate that Calicut gained its eminence only during the 14th century.15

Calicut is an anglicized form of Kozhicode.16 Many historians follow the traditional theories about the origin of the name. According to K.V. Krishna Ayyar, the

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15 M.J.Koshy, Encyclopaedia of India – Kerala, Vol.XX, New Delhi, 1994, p.44.

term was derived from Kozhikotu or Koilkotta, the ‘fortified palace’ of the Zamorins.\textsuperscript{17} A similar explanation is given by K.M. Panikkar too.\textsuperscript{18} There is also a possibility of interpretation to hold that the word Calicut is derived from Kalli + kottai variety of flora available in sandy regions. In that case, the term may mean ‘a palace protected by that flora’. This may not be acceptable for reasons that the particular flora is not available there. Another derivation is from Kallar kottai. Kalli in Tamil means a ‘lady pirate thief’. The term Kallar in Tamil literally means ‘a community of thieves’. The singular female of that community is called Kalli. There is very less possibility of deriving the term thus. The original name of Kozhicode, i.e. Vikramapuram, is now forgotten by the people.\textsuperscript{19} There is another version that the ‘land within the range of cock-crow’ is said to have belonged to the Zamorin.\textsuperscript{20} The noted historians Visscher and Gundert suggest that the term means “so much land as the sound of a cock crowing for its perch could be heard over”.\textsuperscript{21} The term “Calico” was also first applied to Calicut cotton (cloth).\textsuperscript{22} Moreover, Calicut was famous for its Calico cloth, after Portuguese trade. The fame of the cloth earned much name from the foreigners, which perhaps gave this

\textsuperscript{17} K.V. Krishna Ayyar, \textit{The Zamorins of Calicut}, Calicut, 1938, p.83.

\textsuperscript{18} K.M. Panikkar, \textit{A History of Kerala, 1498 – 1801 A.D}, Annamalai Nagar, 1959, pp. 7 – 8.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p.2.

\textsuperscript{20} Maclean, \textit{Glossary of the Madras Presidency}, New Delhi, 1982, p.117.


Calicut became a commercial centre from early times. The pre-historic and iron-age antiquities of ancient Malabar available in the Calicut taluk underscore the importance of this place. The ruler, who succeeded in establishing an independent kingdom on the northern sea-Coast, founded a city named Kozhicode.

The Zamorins followed the policy of tolerance and also contributed a great deal to the steady growth of the place as a commercially vital centre. The friendly attitude of the Zamorins to all foreign traders, their religious tolerance and good administration, and the proper security accorded to the traders, made Calicut the chief centre of trade in Malabar. The city earned names like “a noble city” with “a noble emporium” of all India fame from the travellers Varthema and Nicolo-de-Conti. During the reign of Manavikrama Samoory the sea-Coast of Calicut was converted into a mighty sea-port. Later, it became an important trading centre of the Arabs and the Chinese, where they met to exchange the products of the west with those of the east. Since the 13th century Calicut has attained a position of eminence in the trade of pepper and other spices. It is learnt that the pearls fished from the Korkai region (Gulf of Mannar), were taken to

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Uraiyur (present Tiruchirapalli) and from there to Muziri i.e. Murasee panthanam of Ramayana fame. The demand for these commodities made Calicut a great emporium of international trade. A number of travellers speak about the natural beauty of Calicut. The city was extremely neat in the plains of the mighty Western Ghats. These Ghats have the appearance of changing colours and its peak stands as a sentinel over this wonderful city of Kerala. The rich vegetation in Calicut triggered its economic activities, and the restless waves of the sea attracted foreigners to trade with the natives. They export pepper, cardamoms, sandalwood, arrack, nuts, coconuts, coconut oil, gingely, grain, roots etc.

Foreign Notices on Calicut:

Evidences show that Calicut gained importance only from the 14\textsuperscript{th} century. Ibn Battuta, a foreign traveller, visited Calicut in 1342. He records that Calicut was the commercially important port city of Malabar. There were merchants from all parts of the world. In the beginning of the 15\textsuperscript{th} century, the Chinese Muslim traveller Mahuan visited Calicut. He gives valuable information about the city. He says that the Arabs and the Chinese were the traders who frequently kept trade contacts with Calicut.

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Mahuan describes the nature and wealth of the port town of Calicut too.\(^{34}\) He records that “much pepper is grown on the hills. Coconuts are extensively cultivated, many farmers are owning a thousand trees”.\(^{35}\) At the port, ships came from China and the Arab countries. To the Chinese, it was \textbf{Ku-Li-Fo}, “the most important of all the maritime centres of trade”.\(^{36}\)

According to his account, when a ship arrives from China, the king’s oversees with a Chetti goes on board and makes an invoice of goods, and a day is settled for valuing the cargo. On the appointed day, the supervisors first inspected and valued especially the silk goods. When the price was decided on, all who were present joined hands, whereupon the broker would announce, “The price of your goods is now fixed, and cannot in any way be altered”. The Persian ambassador Abdur Razzak from Merat was sent by Sultan Shahrulah, son of Timur, to the court of \textit{Zamorin} of Calicut.\(^{37}\) He visited Calicut in 1422 and describes the sea-faring population of Calicut as \textbf{Chinbachajam}, meaning ‘China boys’. He also mentions the role of the Chinese in Calicut. He further testifies to the importance of \textbf{Malabar} trade with the Arab countries and the dominant role played by the Arabs at Calicut. Moreover, the port city of Calicut was perfectly a secured harbour, which, like Ormuz, attracted merchants from every city and from every country. Precious commodities in abundance were brought here from

\(^{34}\) A. Sreedhara Menon, \textit{A Survey of Kerala History}, Madras, 1994, p.20.


maritime countries especially from Abyssinia, Zibad and Zanzibar. Security and justice were so firmly established in the city that the wealthiest merchants brought here considerable cargoes from maritime countries which they unloaded and unhesitatingly sent to the markets and bazaars without checking the account or watching over the goods. The officers of the custom-house took upon themselves the charge of looking after the merchandise over which they kept watching day and night. When a sale was affected, they levied a duty of one-fortieth part on the goods, if they were not sold and they would make no charge on them.  

Several other travellers who visited Calicut described it as ‘a noble emporium’ of India. Nicolo-de-Conti, the Venetian traveller who visited Calicut in 1444, describes Calicut as “a maritime city in 8 miles circumference, a notable emporium for all India abounding in pepper, lac, ginger and a large kind of cinnamon, myrobalam and zedari”. The Russian traveller Athanaseus Nikitan who visited Calicut in 1468 says, “Calicut is a port for the whole Indian sea, which God forbid, any craft to cross, and who ever saw it, will not go over it healthy. The country produces pepper, ginger, coconut plants, muscat, cloves, cinnamon, aromatic roots, adrach and every description of spices and everything in cheap and servants and maids are very good”.  

Ludovico-di-Varthema, the citizen of Italy, stayed in the Malabar Coast between 1504 and 1508. He gave a detailed account in his Travels of Ludovico-di-Varthema in

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38 Ibid., p. 20.
40 Ibid., p. 283.
Egypt, Syria, Arabia, Deserta and Arabia Felix in Persia, India and Ethiopia. He visited Malabar regions (Calicut) and observed large numbers of the Moors, bankers and money-changers flocking the port-city of Calicut. A trader named Ralph Fitch visited Calicut in 1588. He was the first Englishman to set his foot on the shores of Calicut.

Another travel account, worthy of note is the Voyage of John Huygen Van Linschoten in Malabar. Its author was a native of Holland. He had stayed in Goa for sometime and left India in 1598. During his stay at Goa he assisted the Archbishop and showed genuine interest in the nature of the society built on a hierarchical order. The two volumes of Tome Pires dwell on various topics such as politics, commerce, social customs and religious practices. The Book of Duarte Barbosa in two volumes is virtually a mine of information about Malabar during the 16th century. In the second volume of his account he mentions matters relating to the political history of the Zamorins and their people.

‘Tohfit-ul-Mujahideen’ of Sheik Zein-ud-din of Ponnani of the Malabar Coast is the earliest work of a scholar to compile the historical work. His work is a valuable

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account of the safety of Malabar and described the Zamorins’ socio-political administration. The Zamorin is depicted as the most powerful ruler in Malabar on account of the material prosperity of his empire.46

Pyrad de Lavel, a French who visited Calicut early in the 17th century (1607) mentions that Calicut was the busiest commercial center in the whole of India where merchants from all nations and religions conducted trade.47 He describes the security and the religious freedom enjoyed by all classes of people and praises the efficiency of the system of judicial administration there. Another notable traveller of Rome was Sig Pietro Della Villa. He reached Calicut in 1623 with an embassy from the Viceroy of Goa to the Zamorin of Calicut. He gives valuable information regarding the socio-economic and the political condition of the Kingdom.

In between 1672 and 1681, Dr. John Fryer travelled in Calicut, and noticed that the importance of the pepper wealth of Calicut (Tanur). Mr. Forbes who visited Calicut in 1672 describes it as a big city where the merchants of Persia, Arabia, Africa and the other parts of India and purchased pearls, diamonds, spices, ivory, etc. Moreover, he informs that the Zamorin held a splendid court. Travellers from Geneovese namely Hieronimi Di Santa Stefano and another diplomat, namely, Pero Decovilham from Portuguese mention about Calicut. According to Heiroinimo DiSanta Stefano, “Calicut


is a great city”. The Portuguese diplomat describes it as a strange and gorgeous city of thatched houses and half naked men, of coco-palms besides the beach, of gold and jewels of elephants and pepper. Pepper may not mean much to the people today but in that age, it ranked with precious stones. Men risked the perils of the deep and fought and died for pepper. He was particularly impressed by the prosperous trade in pepper carried on through the port of Calicut.

Mountains and Hills:

The Zamorin’s kingdom too is endowed with these natural gifts. The natural scenario of Calicut varies from the radiant beauty of the sparkling sands touched by the waves of the Arabian Sea to the majesty of the Western Ghats. The greatest scenic glory of Calicut is the long array of the Western Ghats. Most of the mountains are situated in the taluks of Ernadu, Badagara and South Wayanadu taluk. The most important hills are the Vavulor Wayutmala, Vellaramalai, the Chekkamalai, the Pandalurmalai, Urotmala, the Nattavarammalai, Mottumala or Manikunnu, Elamleilerimala and Kurichipandimala. These hills are situated at the east of the Calicut city. All the hills

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49 Vellaramalai is situated in the trijunction of the taluks of South Wayanadu, Ernadu and Calicut.

50 Pandalurmalai separates Ernadu from Palghat District.


and mountains are rich in minerals and were donned with evergreen trees.\textsuperscript{53} The seashore of Calicut abounds in thick groves of coconut trees. Pervannamuzhy and Kuttiady are the other important hill stations. Valuable teak and other kinds of timber, bamboos and hollow reeds are grown abundantly in the dense forest of the Ghats on the northeast. The lofty range of mountains to the east is called Wavootmalla.\textsuperscript{54} As spices are abundantly cultivated here, this region has earned the name ‘spice country’ which includes Calicut also.\textsuperscript{55}

**Rivers of Calicut:**

Water is the primary requirement of man, both for his personal use and for the economic prosperity of the country. Rivers are used for irrigation, production of electricity and for transport. The alluvium deposited by the rivers gives fertility to the soil. The culture of India is influenced by the forests, deserts, rivers and mountain valleys from the primitive age.\textsuperscript{56} In fact, all the civilizations of the world sprang up along river valleys. In Calicut, most of the rivers originate from the Western Ghats. These are largely used for irrigation, navigation and transport of timber. Most of the rivers of Calicut drain into the Arabian Sea.


\textsuperscript{55} Francis Day, *Land of the Perumals*, Madras, 1863, p.73.

The river Mahe, also called the Mayyazhipuzha originates from the forests on the western slopes of Wayanadu hills. This river connects a number of villages. This river meanders for 55kms and falls into the Arabian Sea at the French settlement of Mahe. Parakadavu River is navigable in all seasons.\(^{57}\) The river Kottiady, also known as river Murad, takes its origin from the Narikota ranges on the western slopes of Wayanadu hills, a part of the Western Ghats. This river flows through Vadakara, and Quilandy taluks of Calicut. It empties itself into the Arabian Sea, seven miles south of Vadakara. This river is also used for navigation.\(^{58}\)

The river Korapuzha is formed by the confluence of the two streams, the Punnurpuzha and Agalapuzha. Of the two, the latter connects all the important industrial towns. The upper reaches of Punnurpuzha are mainly used for floating timber.\(^{59}\) The river Kallai has its origin at Cherukala village in Calicut taluk. In India, Kallai is one of the biggest centres of timber\(^{60}\) and the second largest timber yard of the world.\(^{61}\) The river Beypore originates in the Ilambari hills in Gudalur taluk of Nilgiri District in

Tamil Nadu. The length of the river is 169 kms. It has a number of tributaries. As an inter-state river it also touches Malappuram and Feroke in the Calicut District before it enters the Arabian Sea.

Historically, the river Kadalundi is the most important one mentioned as Tyndis both by Ptolemy and by the author of the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea. It is also known by the names of Karimpuzha and Oravanpurampuzha. This river is used for navigation. In course of time, the place became an important trading centre for lime shell, fish, coconut, yarn and coir. The Collector of Malabar tried to complete an uninterrupted water way from Badagara to Trivandrum by constructing a canal from the river Kadalundi to Ponnani, though it is “impassable except for the smallest boats at the height of the monsoon”.

Climate:

The climate of Calicut is influenced by the position of the Kingdom both in the large land mass of Kerala and the head of the Arabian Sea. Calicut has a tropical

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maritime climate with almost uniform temperature throughout the year.\textsuperscript{69} Rainfall is the chief characteristic feature, which determines the climate of Calicut. The small size of the District and its varied physical features play a prominent role in determining the climatic variations in different parts. The climatic variations influence the life and customs of the people. The climate, on the whole, is healthy.\textsuperscript{70} Many activities on the earth depend upon soil, water, resources, vegetation, occupation, etc. Agriculture and industry depend largely on the climate. As we find unity in diversity in the Kingdom among its different people, so do we find monsoonal unity in the midst of climate diversity. The Coastal place used to experience an equitable climate due to the influence of sea. But an inland or interior place will experience a high range of temperature. The inland areas of Calicut which are far from the influence of the sea, experience a humid climate with an oppressive hot season. The mean temperature for the year at Calicut is below 81°F. The hot season extends from March to May in the District. During the period between December and March, the District receives no rain; from October onwards, the temperature gradually increases to reach the maximum in May which is the hottest month of the year. Humidity is very high in the Coastal region.

**Rainfall:**

There is a close relationship among temperature, wind and wind pressure. The high temperature experienced in the month of March, April and May decreases as the monsoon winds begin to blow and there prevails a uniform temperature throughout the


\textsuperscript{70} B. Razil Derry, \textit{Imperial Gazetteers of India}, Vol. II, Delhi, 1988, p.356.
region. During south-west monsoon, the seasonal winds that blow from the Arabian sea bring rain to the Kerala Coast in the first week of June and gradually move northwards and by the end of June they give rainfall to the whole of India. The entire State of Kerala including Calicut receives heavy rainfall,\(^71\) branch wind from the Arabian sea is obstructed by the Western Ghats and its western slopes. Generally, the ancient Malabar - the present Kerala - receives monsoon rains from the two monsoon seasons. Calicut receives rain from the south-west monsoon from June to September and the north-east monsoon from December to February. The months of October and November are considered as post - monsoon or the retreating monsoon season of Calicut.\(^72\) Calicut which receives an average rainfall of 200 cm is grouped under very heavy rainfall regions in India.

**Soil:**

Soil is one of the major natural gifts that decides the history and culture of a country. The prosperity of Calicut during the medieval period was largely derived from the agrarian economy\(^73\). Much importance was attached to land, as it was the chief source and means of production. The fertility of the soil totally changes the economic activities of the people especially increasing the yields of cultivated crops. The deposits


of alluvium,\textsuperscript{74} teris and blown sands increase the agricultural products of the Kingdom. On the basis of productivity, the soil of Malabar is divided into three types: 1) Pasimakar, that is a rich clayey and tenacious soil which is found in wet land and is suitable for paddy cultivation. It is called by various names such as kandam, nilam, ela, padagaram and punjai according to the regional variations. Other items like parmkuy vayal and karai are also popular.\textsuperscript{75} 2) Pasimarasi, which is good for miscellaneous food crops. It is found mixed in the Coastal region. 3) Rasikari consists of loose sand and is used for coconut cultivation. It can be called the garden land. The elevated regions and the soil mixed with laterite and is good for cash crop.\textsuperscript{76}

Generally, Calicut is divided into three divisions namely the coastal, midland and mountainous regions. The Coastal region is a narrow belt and is formed of recent deposits of sand. Laterite soil is present in the midland region and the mountainous regions covered red and white or yellow clay.\textsuperscript{77} Different varieties of soil are classified as red clay, red loam, red sand and arenaceous sand which are largely found in Calicut.\textsuperscript{78}

Minerals:

Minerals are one of the natural resources which fill the treasury of the Kingdom. The major minerals are used to fulfill the daily needs of the people. But in the Calicut


\textsuperscript{76} K.P. Padmanabha Menon, \textit{Kochi Rajya Caritram} (Mal.), Trichur, 1912, p.269.


region, the mineral wealth is poor. The areas like Nilambur produce small quantity of alluvial gold, but its deposits are uneconomical. Iron ore is found in Porur, Chembarrasseri and Pandikkat. Limestones are produced in the backwaters of Korapuzha River. Besides, monazite and limonite are produced from the beach sands in small quantity.79 Foreign accounts give some information about the minerals available in the Malabar region. According to Duarte Barbosa, rubies, amethyst and some other soft sapphires were found in the Malabar Rivers.80 There were some precious stones, which had the colour of ruby on one half and the other half that of a sapphire or topaz.

**Flora and Fauna:**

The variance in climate and seasons are their impact on vegetation. Calicut is also rich in fauna, flora and some mineral resources. Its forests abound is a variety of animals and birds.81 The fertile soil of the various regions and the suitable climatic conditions pave the way for the abundant products of flora and fauna in Calicut. Various sorts of commodities including spices are much sought after by the merchant communities from different parts of the world. The flora of Calicut is characteristically tropical due to the heavy rainfall, moderate temperature and the high mountains. The physical divisions of the district cover the areas of high land and Coastal midland regions, forming nearly parallel belts along the length of the district.82

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The natural forests of Calicut fall under three main categories; the southern tropical deciduous, western tropical, wet evergreen and semi evergreen. The southern tropical deciduous forests are known as monsoon forests and are found in the regions with a rainfall of 100-200 cm range. In the western tropical wet evergreen forests thrive well under conditions of very heavy rainfall of over 300 cm per year, and in a climate of even temperatures and high humidity and the semi evergreen forests are suitable for the growth of teak, ebony, palm tree, bamboo and rubber.\(^83\) The products of the forests of Calicut have attracted the West since early times.\(^84\) The prevalence of cultural and commercial contacts between the western Coast of Peninsular India and the contemporary civilizations of the West and China have been proved by literary as well as archaeological pieces of evidence. But during the long centuries of contact, attention of trade was mainly on the renowned spices, pepper and fancy items such as ivory, peacocks and monkeys.\(^85\) Though timber like the teak was also known to and used by the westerners, the systematic extraction on a large scale of the immense timber wealth of the forests did not begin.\(^86\)

Even during the age of the conflict between the various European powers on the Malabar Coast, the bone of contention was not the right on the forests as such but over the control of trade in pepper and spices. During the visit of Francis Buchanan in

\(^{83}\) Ibid., pp. 24 – 25.


\(^{85}\) E.H. Warmington, *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India*, Delhi, 1974, pp.22 – 25.

Malabar, he pointed out that the forests of Malabar were very fine and also mentioned that the teak and other forest trees were then fast springing up around banyan and palmyra trees.\(^{87}\) It was only after the establishment of political hegemony by the British over this part of the country that the forests attained strategic potential and significance. The large scale commercial extraction of timber from the Malabar forest was directly and profoundly influenced by the over impact of British colonial interests. In the medieval period, with the rise of brahminical supremacy in Malabar, there arose a strong tradition which prohibited strictly the non-brahmins from using the timbers like teak for their house construction. According to this tradition, the teak was to be used only to construct temples, Nambutiri houses and a few of the aristocratic houses of the privileged classes.\(^{88}\) The Portuguese and other European powers too used the same timber available in Malabar for the same purpose.

During the administration of the East India Company they appointed a Bengal – Bombay Joint Commission in 1792 to inspect the State and condition of the Malabar province. The reports submitted in 1792 mentions certain interesting information on the Malabar forests, on the one hand, and the insight of the early British administrators about the forests of Malabar on the other. The report further tells us teak (sagavan) and bamboos were largely found in the Malabar forests.\(^{89}\) Again, Malabar Coast was famous for the wood known as ebony. The Greeks knew the most valuable timber, ebony


\(^{89}\) H. Smith (Reprint) Reports of the Joint Commissioner from Bengal and Bombay, pp.86 – 87, 1972 – 93, para.10.
exported from the northern part of the west-Coast i.e., the Malabar Coast.\textsuperscript{90} The author of Periplus of the Erythraean Sea says that the expedition of the queen Hatshepust also brought ebony from the land of Punt.\textsuperscript{91} Punt (Pandya) being the land to which Indian goods were systematically taken from India, there is much likelihood that the queen got the excellent ebony from Malabar forests. In the account of Duarte Barbosa of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century mention is made of the abundant product of aloes-wood exported from Calicut.\textsuperscript{92}

Coconut, the important commercial crop, received a boost in Malabar in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. In the salty and sandy alluvial soils of the Coastal regions these important trees thrive well.\textsuperscript{93} It is true that Calicut is mostly covered by sea-shore and sandy alluvial soil of rivers and lakes. The coconut tree was considered to be the most profitable tree of India.\textsuperscript{94} As per the accounts of Tome Pires, Malabar produced coconuts of superior quality compared with those of other countries.\textsuperscript{95} Varthema gives an exhaustive and picturesque account of coconut in Malabar.\textsuperscript{96} During this period the Ezhavas greatly


resorted to its cultivation as their main occupation.\textsuperscript{97} In the \textit{parambu} lands of the Syrian Christians and the \textbf{Nayar} landlords in the \textbf{Malabar} region coconut was mostly cultivated by the \textbf{Ezhavas}. The presence of coconut trees on the sea-board, on the shores of the lagoons and on the banks of rivers of the country were mostly observed by the foreign travellers. During the visit of Duarte Barbosa in Calicut, he saw the palm trees higher than the highest Cypresses; the palm trees mentioned by him are the coconut trees.\textsuperscript{98}

During the age of the \textit{Zamorins}' rule in Calicut, coconut played an important part all through her history.\textsuperscript{99} The region is covered with thick forests and varying degree of temperature, rainfall and different kinds of vegetations. It favoured the growth of commercial crops of spices like pepper, ginger, cardamoms, cinnamon, tamarinds, canafistula and myrabolans. The spices are also used as medicine. So the demand for spices increased and the planters cultivated a large quantity because the trade of spices gave much profit to the traders. Spices were the natural wealth of \textbf{Malabar}, largely produced and supplied to foreigners.

Pepper, the notable spice, is a pungent condiment obtained from the small but dried fruits of a creeper plant. In early times, the \textbf{Chera} Country was noted for pepper, the “black gold” of \textbf{Malabar}. \textbf{Sangam} works like \textit{Ahananuru}\textsuperscript{100} as well as \textit{Patirrupathu}.

\textsuperscript{99} K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, \textit{A History of South India from the Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar}, London, 1955, pp.35 – 36.
\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Ahananuru}, 149, 11. 7 – 10, See also \textit{Patirrupathu}. 
make mention that the foreigners came to the Chera ports in ships with gold to be bartered for pepper. It was perhaps the magnet that attracted merchants from far and wide to Malabar. Pepper was referred to by Hippocrates as the “Indian remedy” and other writers have also mentioned it when they dealt with medicine. In records it was known to the people as gulmirch, babush, vallajun, muriching, martz, darugamiri, choca and millagu. It was used as a preservative and for maintaining the heat of the body in cold countries.

Pepper was cultivated in plenty in all parts of Malabar from Cannanore to Travancore. To the Portuguese, it was known as “reino da Pimenta” or “Pepper kingdom”. Pepper cultivation was marked by a rapid development in the 16th century when compared to the previous centuries. The cultivation of pepper was more extensive in the northern part of Malabar than in the middle or the southern regions. Important places like Calicut and Elavana are noted as the most productive areas of pepper in Calicut. According to Duarte Barbosa in the kingdom of Calicut, “there grows much pepper on trees like ivy, which climbs up the palms and other trees”.

102 G. Watt, A Dictionary of the Commercial Products of India, New Delhi, 1972, p.896.
103 K.M. Panikkar, Malabar and the Portuguese, 1560 – 1663, Bombay, 1929, p.15.
105 Duarte Barbosa, A Description of the Coast of East Africa and Malabar in the Beginning of the 16th Century, New Delhi, 1995, p.154.
Among the commercial spices mentioned in the medieval records, ginger was next only to pepper among the spices which were produced largely in Malabar for commercial transactions as well as medicine. The favourable climatic condition of Calicut and the fertile soil helped in the production of ginger in large quantity in that region. It is known to the local people as ‘inchi’ when it is green and its dried part is known as ‘chukku’. Among the different varieties of ginger cultivated in Malabar, Calicut ginger was considered to be of high quality by the foreigners.\textsuperscript{106} In the regions of Cannanore, Mount D’Ely and Calicut, the agriculturists have largely cultivated beledi ginger.\textsuperscript{107} Malabar was one of the earliest trading centers which exported its commercial spices to the Roman world.\textsuperscript{108} It proves that ginger was cultivated in Malabar from time immemorial, as it finds mention in the Hebrew literature as gingiber.

In Malabar, the commercial spice crop namely cardamom was largely grown. Various records have made special mention about cardamom cultivation in Calicut during the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. In the Calicut region and its nearest places different kinds of this plant were cultivated.\textsuperscript{109} One variety of cardamom was smaller and brownish while another was yellowish.\textsuperscript{110} Cardamom was named according to the shape of its seeds. Its seed capsules were used in medicines, perfumes and ointments. From early times, cardamom

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had been largely found in Malabar and Travancore, especially in their high lands.\textsuperscript{111} It was locally called ‘elakai’.\textsuperscript{112} The crop was extensively grown in the gardens of betel, pepper and palm and the soil which was kept continuously moist.

Cinnamon was the yellowish brown spice made from the dried inner bark of evergreen tree of shrub, native to the Malabar forests.\textsuperscript{113} It was largely used as spices and in medicine. During the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, Malabar produced inferior quality of cinnamon.\textsuperscript{114} Duarte Barbosa mentions that the kingdom of Calicut had wild cinnamon.\textsuperscript{115}

Myrobolans of different varieties used as drugs were found in many places in Malabar. It was used to make dyes and also used as a medicine for digestion and to purify blood.\textsuperscript{116} Ayurvedic medicines made from the myrobolans have been found very effective to fight asthma and diabetics. It was largely cultivated in Calicut after the arrival of Vasco-da-Gama.\textsuperscript{117}

People and their Occupation:

During the medieval period, a society in which people specialized in various occupations based on caste-oriented “division of labour” was in vogue in Calicut.\textsuperscript{118} Certain types of works were considered indecent and those who were engaged in such works were untouchables to the higher castes. The Hindus of Kerala in medieval times were divided into 64 castes and communities, with their sub-divisions. Among them, Brahmins or Nambutiris and their allied castes occupied the foremost place in the society. Next to the Brahmins, the Nayars enjoyed the superior status. Other sections of the people ranked next to the higher caste people followed the footsteps of the latter.\textsuperscript{119} Among the Brahmins were aristocrats, priests and scholars and they generally performed the rituals and offerings in the temples.\textsuperscript{120} The Nayars were mainly soldiers, involved in military, the war activities. The Tiyyas were treated as a low caste people and they were engaged in agriculture. The artisan group in the society did every thing to meet the day to day requirements of the above sects of people.

It is well-known that the Kingdom of Calicut had the natural frontiers of the Western Ghats in the East and the Arabian Sea on the west. This has given the Kingdom a potential due to natural resources of the mountain and the sea. The bye products of the mountains and the sea gave the Zamorins to have the sway of the region. The natural way i.e. the sea made the Zamorins a sea-faring dynasty of rulers and his city the commercial emporium of the West India. This has vastly helped in shaping the history of

\textsuperscript{118} P.V. Kane, \textit{History of Dharmasastras}, Vol. IV, Poona, 1974, pp.923-8.
\textsuperscript{120} K.K.N. Kurup, \textit{Aspects of Kerala History and Culture}, Trivandrum, 1977, p.39.
Calicut. With these facilities the *Zamorins* were in a position to consolidate the kingdom of Calicut by conquest and subjugation, which is discussed in detail in the following chapter.