A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE STUDY AREA

The name Kerala originated from the term Keralam, now generally assumed to mean the land of the Cheras. According to Dr Gundert, Keran is the Canarese dialectical form of cheram that is Cheras. The Keralolpathi derives the name Kerala from an early Perumal (King) named Kerala. Another theory connects the name with the keram meaning coconut found in the commoner in Nalikeram1.

Topography

Kerala, God’s own country has had the distinction of being an independent social-geographical and political entity from very early days. Its unique geographical position and peculiar physical features have inverted Kerala with a distinct identity.2 Kerala lies in between the high Western Ghats on the East and the Arabian sea on the West, the width of the state varies from 35 km to 120 km. The state has a coast of length 590 km (390 mi). Kerala state lays between

80 18' and 12° 48' North latitude and between 74° 52' and 72° 22' East longitudes3. According to the geographical features, the state can be divided into hills, valleys, midland plains and costal belt4. The Western Ghats which range along the eastern borderer constitute the hills and valleys in its upper range while the lower ranges of the forest are interspersed with plantations5. The mid land stretches along the coastal plain with sandy soil stretches over the Western side of the state. Between the two, the mid land plains where agriculture is the main occupation. The state has an area of 38,863 km² (15,005 sq mi)6 and is bordered by Karnataka to the North and Northeast, Tamil Nadu to the South and Southeast, and the Arabian Sea in the West.

**Mountains**

Kerala was once called as *Malanadu* which means *land of hills*. Most of the mountains are the part of the Western Ghats, which forms a continuous mountain range except near Palakkad where

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4 During the Sangham Age the land was divided on the basis of soil formations and regions. The forest regions were called Kurunji and Mullai, the uncultivable barren and rocky regions *pala or palm*, the cultivable area *marutham* and the coastal tract *neytal lands*. (A.Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, p.13.)


there is a natural mountain pass known as the Palakkad gap that connects Tamilnadu. The average elevation of the Ghats is about 1500 meters above the sea level. The important mountain ranges includes Vellarimala, Sabarimala, Anamudi, Ponmudi, Agasthyamala, Ambukuthimala, Ezhimala, Nilgiri etc. most of the mountains are once inhabitation of ancient tribes. Anamudi peak in the high range of Idukki District rises to a height of 8841 feet, which is the highest point in South India. Some of the important pilgrim centres of Kerala are located in the hilltop. The Sastha shrine at Sabarimala and the Catholic Church at Malayattur hill attracts thousands.

**Rivers**

The river system of Kerala is blessed with nature. There are about 44 rivers of which 41 rivers flow towards west and reaches Arabian Sea. All the west flowing rivers originate from the Western Ghats. Only three tributaries of the river Cauvery originates in Kerala and flow into the neighbouring states. Most of the rivers are rainfed and therefore fluctuate in volume and many of these are non-perennial. Bharathapuzha (*nila*), Periyar, Pamba, Chaliyar are the important rivers. In addition to the river system, Kerala has a continuous chain of lagoons and backwaters which makes Kerala a great scope for tourism. The most important lakes in north Kerala are Kumbala, Bekal, Kavvai etc. Vembanad Lake is the biggest one
which stretches from Alleppy to Cochin. It covers an area of 79 Sq. Miles. Kayamkulam, Ashtamudi are other important lakes. Sasthamcotta Lake is the only major fresh water lake in Kerala.

**Climate**

The diversity of the physical features of the state resulted in corresponding diversity of climate. The high ranges have a cool and bracing climate throughout the year, while the plains are hot and humid. Though the mean temperature is only 90°F Fahrenheit. The average rainfall in the state is probably high. It is significant that the state gets rainfall both from the South-West and North-East monsoon. The South-West monsoon starts towards the end of May or the beginning of the June, while North-East monsoon starts in October and continue till December.\(^7\)

**Flora and Fauna**

Kerala is famous for its biodiversity, which is bulkily concentrated and protected in the Sahyadri or the Western Ghats.\(^8\) Kerala comprises 17324 Sq. Km of forest including tropical wet evergreen, semi ever green forest. Altogether the 24% of land is fulfilled by forest. The state has 5 national parks, 16 wild life sanctuaries 2

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\(^7\) A.Sreedhara Menon, *op.cit*, p.19.

\(^8\) *Manorama Yearbook*, 2003, p.517.
biosphere reserves and one community reserve. The Eravikulam national park in the Edukki district has the highest population of Nilgiri Thar. Mathikettan Shola national park, Periyar national park, Chinnar wildlife Sanctuary, Parambikulam wildlife Sanctuary, Silent valley national park, Karimpuzha national park are the few protected forests in Kerala. These areas are adorned with ever green forest in higher altitudes followed by Shola forest. Shola forests have high ecological significance in protecting the head waters of the rivers.

The coconut tree (kalpavriksha) grows enormously in all parts of the Kerala. Elephants are an integral part of festivals in Kerala and it has a prestigious place in the state’s culture. Elephant is the state animal and featured on the emblem of the Government of Kerala.

**The People**

The native people of South India including Kerala are called Dravidians. According to R.C. Majumdar “The Mediterranean peoples are generally, in popular usage, referred to as Dravidians” he

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10. A special type of mountain forest found in the Western Ghats region of Kerala and Karnataka and some parts of Nilgiri Tamilnadu, the term *Shola* owes its origin from the Tamil word ‘*cholai*’ meaning a stream or cool, shady place.


12. The word *Dravidian* was coined by Robert Caldwell in his book of comparative Dravidian Grammer based on the usage of the Sanskrit word *Dravida*. 
also add “the oldest living specimens of the Dravidian language shows that the Mediterranean peoples who them possessed a much higher degree of civilization”. The people of Kerala had no social inequalities or caste systems in the ancient period. According to the legendaries of King Mahabali, the people of Kerala lived in harmony without any discrimination of caste, colour or creed. During the early centuries of Christian era known as Sangham age the country witnessed important social and cultural development. The basic elements necessary for the flowering of a composite culture were present in Kerala society\footnote{Raman Nair.R, I Sulochana Devi, \textit{Chattampi Swamikal: An Intellectual Biography}, Centre for South Indian Studies, Trivandrum, 2010, p.15.}. Rice is the staple food of the people; the \textit{sadhya} (feast) is traditionally served on green banana leaves. Both men and women wear traditional garments including \textit{mundu}, a loose piece of cloth wrapped around men’s waists. Women typically wear sari, a long elaborated wrapped banner of cloth. Modern north Indian dresses are popular in Kerala. Though people are fond of modern trends, they love and preserve their tradition and culture.

\textbf{Festivals}

Kerala developed its own culture and rituals. Onam is the major festival of Kerala. It is a truly secular festival in which people of all religions and castes take part with equal zeal. The festival commemorates the Vamana avatar of Lord Vishnu and the
subsequent homecoming of the Emperor Mahabali, the legendary ruler of Kerala. Onam is celebrated during the month of Chingam (August – September) and lasts for ten days. During the Onam festival people use to decorate Pookalam outside their houses as a symbol of welcoming King Mahabali. During the Onam celebrations there will be colourful parade of elephants and fireworks. For entertainment, the popular Indian dance, Kathakali would be performed and other spectacular events like carnivals and sports events would be organized. The Vallamkali (boat race) is one of the main attractions and is best seen in Aranmulai and Kottayam. Apart from this people celebrates Vishu, Deepavali, Christmas, Ramzan, Id Al Fitr etc. in great manner.

**Art Forms**

Kathakali is the most prominent theatre dance in Kerala which was developed in the seventeenth century. The theme of the Kathakali is based on myths and legends of the Hindu religion; the drama contains gods, demons, warriors, sages, villains and ladies. Usually the lady characters are performed by men. Before performing Kathakali, the artist must train for six years. The lyrics of Kathakali have great literary value. Mohiniyattam is another traditional dance form of Kerala, which is one of the eight Indian classical dance forms. 

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forms. It is a solo dance performed by women. The dance follows the classical text *Hastha Lakshanadeepika*, which has elaborate description of *Mudras*. *Ottam Thullal*, is another typical temple art of Kerala. *Kudiyattam*, a traditional Sanskrit theatre is another art form in Kerala, which is officially recognised by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. *Kudiyattam* is an ancient temple art in which two or more characters take part including the clown who sent the audience in joy. *Theyyam*, *padayani* are other major art forms. *Margam kali* is a traditional group dance performed during Syrian Christian festivals. *Travancore* king Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma popularised Carnatic music in Kerala. *Panchavadyam* is a different form of percussion ensemble using five types of percussion instruments.

**Language**

Malayalam is the official language of Kerala, The word *Malayalam* is derived from two words of Tamil and Malayalam – *mala* meaning *hill* and *elam* meaning *region*. Malayalam thus translates as “hill region” and used to refer to the land itself and later became the name of the language. It evolved from the western dialect of Tamil with extensive influx of Sanskrit’s words. According to A R Raja Raja Varma who heavily contributed for the development of Malayalam grammar, is of the opinion that Malayalam originated from ancient Tamil. In the course of the 9th to the 12th centuries a new language
known as *Manipravalam*, a curious mixture of Tamil and Sanskrit came into vogue. Having originated as an offshoot of Tamil, it came under the influence of Sanskrit and Prakrit when the Brahmins become an important element in the politics of Kerala and in due course of time it came to have a literature of its own. As it evolved as a distinct language Malayalam discarded the old *vattezhuthu* script and evolved a new script based on *Grantha* used in South India for writing Sanskrit. The earliest extant literary work in Malayalam is *Ramacharitam*, an epic poem written in the late thirteenth century. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries marked a new phase in the evolution of Malayalam literature. The period was also remarkable in the sense that Malayalam literature was patronised in the courts of king and chieftains. The evolution of the language and culture of Kerala has also been influenced by contacts with the Tamil and Kannada regions. The southern dialect of Malayalam shows traces of Tamil influence while the northern dialect have evidence of Kannada influence. Apart from Malayalam, Tamil and Kannada are common in the borders of Kerala.

**The Polity of Kerala**

The ancient history of Kerala is shrouded with several legends. The most popular legend is related to Parasurama, the Brahmin avatar (incarnation) of Lord Vishnu. The motivation of the

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incarnation was to wage an epic series of vengeful wars on the Kshetriyas. Came a movement when Parasurama was struck remorse at the wanton annihilation he had wrought. He offered severe penance atop the mountain heights. In a mood of profound atonement, the sage heaved his mighty axe into the midst of the distant ocean\textsuperscript{16}. The waves foamed and frothed as a land extending from Gokarnam to Kanyakumari surfaced from the depths of the sea to form the state and hence the sobriquet – “Gods own country”\textsuperscript{17}.

Before looking into the position of women in Kerala, it is essential to go through the brief history of Kerala. Kerala’s early human occupation trace back to Neolithic era. The relics of dolmens locally known as Muniyara derived from Muni [Hermit or Sage, and ara (dolmen)] in the Marayur area proves this theory. The Rock – engravings in the Edakkal caves are thought to date from the early to late Neolithic eras around 5000 B.C. Kerala and Tamil Nadu once shared a common language and culture within an area known as Tamilakam. Kerala has also always comes within the catchment area of conquest of the various powers that held sway in the neighbouring Tamil and Kannada areas. The Chalukyas, the Rashtrakutas, the Pandyas and the Cholas invaded Kerala several times in the ancient period while in the later period the rulers of Vijayanagar and Mysore carried out aggressive raids into Kerala region.

\textsuperscript{16} The official web portal of government of Kerala – www.kerala.gov.in

\textsuperscript{17} Official logo of the Kerala government Tourism department.
The earliest known rulers of Kerala belong to the Ay dynasty, whose remote ancestors are mentioned in the Asoka Rock Edicts II and XIV. Thus the antiquity of the ‘Ays’ dates back to fifth century B.C.\textsuperscript{18} The literary works of the Sangam age referred to some important Ay kings, who were related to Travancore\textsuperscript{19}. During the Sangam age, the Chera rulers ruled Kerala. Utiyan Cheralatan, Nedum Cheralatan, Palyanai Sel Kelu Kuttuvan, Narmudi Cheral,Vel Kelu Kuttuvan, Adu Kottu Pattu Cheralatan, Selva Kadumko Valiatan, Perum Cheral Irumporai, Illam Cheral Irumporai were the important early Cheras\textsuperscript{20}. Much of Kerala’s history from the 6\textsuperscript{th} to the 8\textsuperscript{th} century is obscure. After the disintegration of Chera, many petty states emerged. Feudalism was another phenomenon that developed during the 15\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th} centuries. From the Eighteenth century the political history of Kerala become clearer, where Travancore Cochin and Malabar were prominent territories.

The era of foreign intervention began in 1498, when Vasco da Gama landed near Calicut. In the 16\textsuperscript{th} century the Portuguese superseded the Arab traders and dominated the commerce of the Malabar Coast. Their attempt to establish sovereignty was thwarted by the Zamorins of Kozhicode. The Dutch ousted the Portuguese in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century while Dutch faced crushing defeat at the battle of

\textsuperscript{18} K.K.Pillai, \textit{The Suchindram Temple}, Madras, 1953, p.15.
\textsuperscript{19} K.A.Neelakanda Sastri, \textit{A History of South India}, Madras, 1976, p.121.
\textsuperscript{20} A. Sreedhara Menon, \textit{op.cit}, pp.67 – 71.
Kolachel in 1741. By 1806, however, Cochin and Travancore, as well as the Malabar Coast, had become subject states under the British Madras Presidency.}

**Travancore**

Travancore comprised most of modern day southern Kerala, the Kanyakumari district, and the southernmost parts of Tamil Nadu. The term Travancore derived from the Malayalam term Thiruvithamcode, which was the then capital of the state. Travancore was called by different names, the popular names were Venad, Vanchi Desam, Thiru Adidesam. The state was also called as *Sree vazhum kode*, which meant ‘the place of prosperity’. The term Travancore was derived from the word Thiruvithamkur or Thiruvithamcode. The ruling family of Travancore claims its origin from the Chera dynasty. The disintegration of the second Chera Empire led to the way for feudalism in Travancore. Venadu, Attingal, Kayamkulam, Desinganadu, Purrakkadu, Tekkamkur, Vadakkumkur Karunagapally, Karthikapally etc. Maharaja Marthanda Varma is credited as the founder of "Modern Travancore" he consolidated most of the petty states in southern Kerala. He consolidated nearby local kingdoms which include Attingal, Kollam (Desingnad), Kayamkulam,

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Kottarakara (Ilayedattu Swaroopam), Ambalapuzha, Pandalam, Changanasserry, Alangad. He also fought many wars against the kingdom of Cochin. After the death of Marthandavarma his nephew Rama Varma became the ruler. During the reign of Rama Varma, the capital of Travancore was shifted from Padmanabhapuram to Thiruvananthapuram in 1795.

The succession lists of Travancore rulers are as below

1. Anizham Tirunal Marthanda Varma 1729–1758
2. Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma (Dharma Raja) 1758-1798
3. Balarama Varma 1798-1810
4. Gowri Lakshmi Bayi 1810-1815 (Queen from 1810–1813 and Regent Queen from 1813–1815)
5. Gowri Parvati Bayi (Regent) 1815-1829
6. Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma 1829-1846
7. Uthram Thirunal Marthanda Varma 1846–1860
8. Ayilyam Thirunal Rama Varma 1860–1880
9. Visakham Thirunal Rama Varma 1880–1885

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Cochin

The kingdom of Cochin was another kingdom that was a part of Kerala. A few reference in ancient Tamil works and works of European travelers, afford occasional glimpses into the state of Cochin. The only local works that pretend to be historical are the Keralotpatti in Malayalam and the Keralamahatmyam in Sanskrit. The kingdom of parumpadappu or Cochin came into existence about the sixth century A.D. The name of the first king is said to have been Vira Kerala Varma. Nothing however is definitely known about the early history of Cochin. Later become a Portuguese protectorate. Portuguese had a free hand in trade. The other Europeans such as Dutch, British also had the same kind of

24 Keralolpathi literally means creation of Kerala is a Malayalam work that deals with the origin of Kerala. Even though there are contradictions regarding the author. Most of the scholars including Shungunny Menon ascribe the authorship of the work to Thunchaththu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan, a legendary scholar of 17th century.


privileges in Cochin. Later some parts of Cochin territory was under the control of Hyder Ali, which was regained by joining a subsidiary alliance with the British and was under the shadow of British administration until 1947\textsuperscript{27}. The following rulers ruled Cochin during 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

1. Kerala Varma(1888–1895)

2. Rama Varma(1895–1914)

3. Rama Varma(1914–1932)

4. Rama Varma(1932–1941)

5. Kerala Varma (1941–1943) - Midukkan Thampuran

6. Ravi Varma(1943–1946) - Kunjappan Thampuran


\textbf{Malabar}

Malabar was the third region, which lies along the southwest coast of the Indian peninsula and forms the northern part of present-day Kerala state. Malabar was ruled by Zamorins (Samoothiri) between 12\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries with Kozhikode as the capital. Hyder Ali of Mysore over ran smaller principalities in north Malabar and set

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Ibid}, p.168.
up confrontation with the Zamorins. Most of Malabar District was included among the territories ceded to the British East India Company in 1792 by Tipu Sultan of Mysore at the conclusion of the Third Anglo-Mysore War; Wayanad was ceded in 1799 at the conclusion of the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War. The region was organized into a district of the Madras Presidency. The administrative headquarters were at Calicut (Kozhikode).

**Kerala since Independence**

After India gained her independence in 1947, the movement for a united (Aikya) Kerala gathered momentum and thus Travancore and Cochin were merged to form Thiru-Kochi on 1 July 1949. The united Travancore-Cochin state was established Trivandrum as a capital, while high court was established at Kochi. Maharaja of Travancore became the Rajapramukh of the new state. On 1 January 1950, Travancore-Cochin was recognized as a state. The Madras Presidency was organized to form Madras State in 1947 the government of India decided to reorganise the state. For that the states reorganisation commission was constituted by the central government. The commission created a report on 1955 recommending the reorganisation of India’s states on linguistic basis. Accordingly the state reorganisation act was passed in 1956 by the Parliament. On 1st November 1956, the state of Kerala was formed merging the Malabar district and Travancore-Cochin excluding four
Southern Taluks (Agasteeswaram, Thovalai, kalkulam, Vilavancode) which were merged to Tamil Nadu.

The state is administratively divided into 14 districts, 61 taluka, 152 blocks and 1452 revenue villages. Kerala has also 990 village Panchayats, 152 block Panchayats and 14 district Panchayats, besides 53 town municipalities and five city corporations. Thiruvananthapuram is the capital city of Kerala. Alappuzha, Ernakulam, Idukki, Kannur, Kasargod, Kollam, Kottyam, Kozhikode, Malappuram, Palakkad, Pathanamthitta, Thiruvananthapuram, Thrissur and Wyanad are the fourteen districts in Kerala.

Economy

The state produces commercial agricultural products more than food crops. Consequently the state is short of food grains. Kerala has a unique cropping pattern. It accounts for 92 percent of India’s rubber, 70 percent of coconut, 60 percent of tapioca and almost 100 percent of lemon grass oil. Coffee, Tea, Cardamom, Pepper are other major cash crops. Paddy is cultivated in many parts of Kerala particularly in Kuttanad area. Kerala is the single largest producer of a number of other crops like banana and ginger, besides tea and coffee in abundance. Coir and cashew are two large industries. Handloom and bamboo based industries are well developed. Kerala accounts for about 1/3 of India’s marine exports\(^{28}\).

\(^{28}\) *Manorama Year Book 2003*, pp.672 – 673.
The forests yield valuable timbers such as ebony, rosewood and teak. The state is also a national leader in fish production. Sardines, tunas, mackerels and prawns are among the principal products of the industry.

**Tourism**

Kerala is one of the hotspots of tourists throughout the world. A National Geographic Society publication has listed Kerala among the world’s 50 greatest places of a lifetime, the only Indian name other than Taj Mahal. Kovalam, Ponmudi, Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary at Thekkady, Munnar hill station, Athirapalli waterfalls are the important tourist centres. Sree Padmanabha Swami temple, Guruvayoor temple, Sabarimala, Edathuva Church, Beemapalli and Ponnani are some of the spiritual centres in Kerala.

**Population**

According to the census of 2011, the population of Kerala is 3,33,87,677 with a female population of 1,73,66,387. Female population grow at a slower pace of 23.37% during the decade 1981-1991 against a decade growth rate of 23.85% of the total population. Kerala is the densely populated state in India following Bihar and West Bengal. According to the census of India 2011, Kerala has a density of 859 persons per square kilometre while the national average is only 324 per square kilometre.
Social condition

The Aryans of Northern India introduced Fourfold arrangement of socioeconomic categories called the *varnas*, which is traced back to an oral tradition preserved in the Rigveda (dating perhaps from between 1500 and 1200 BCE). The Sanskrit word *Varna* has many connotations including colour, description, selection and classification. In the *Varna* framework, the Brahmans have everything, ‘noble’ identity, status, priestly authority and domination over the Vaishyas and the Shudras, who accounted for the great majority of the people. Kshetryas were the ruling class, who were also under the influence of the Brahmins\(^{29}\). The Aryanization introduced the *Varna* system or the caste system in south India.

The introduction of caste system spoiled the great values of Hinduism. Kerala has a caste hierarchy of its own. Every individual in India shares the caste banner, the worst practice in the Indian society developed from the ancient period. The complex caste system prevalent in Kerala in 18\(^{th}\) and 19\(^{th}\) centuries made chaos in the society. Life in Kerala in this period was controlled and dominated by several caste practices justified by a system called *Keezhmaryada*\(^{30}\).


or Nattunadappu\textsuperscript{31}. In this social atmosphere, the unprivileged class like parayas, pulayas and similar catogerious faced untold miseries. They were denied even the basic human rights. Each caste or its sub – caste had assigned its own job, manner of behaviour and accent in dialect, each caste had insisted separate dress code, ornament code and even food pattern\textsuperscript{32}.

**The Brahmins**

The Brahmins moved to Kerala from third century B.C. along with the Jain and Buddhist monks. The Hiradgalli and other Pallava grants prove that the Brahmins were settled in South India in the fourth or fifth century A.D\textsuperscript{33}. There was large- scale intrusion of Aryan ideas and practices into the native society. Kadamba king, Mayuravarman (A.D 345- 379) invited large colonies of Brahmins and made them settle down in the Kerala and Tuluva regions. In the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries, South Indian rulers like the Chalukyas, the Pallavas and the Rashtrakutas speeded up the process of Aryanization. From the Keralolpathi, it can be observed that the Brahmins had established their social supremacy in Kerala by the eighth century A.D. the generic name of Brahmin in Kerala is Namboottiri. The origin of the word is disputed but no derivation has

\textsuperscript{31} Nattunadappu- Social norms created and imposed by the high caste.

\textsuperscript{32} M Nisar, Meena Kandasamy, *op.cit*, pp.35 – 38.

\textsuperscript{33} C.A. Innes, *op.cit*, p.25.
ever been suggested which can be termed authoritative or convincing. The term ‘tiri’ means holy and is found in many other caste names and titles. The Namboodiri like other Brahmins are divided into exogamous gotrams. Namboodiries claim that all the land in Kerala was originally vested in them and them alone. Namboodiri mostly lived secluded lives in their family homes which are called illams. Namboodiri are polluted by touch of all caste below them and by the approach of all lower than Nairs.

Caste system was an instrument to keep up Brahmin supremacy in the society. Soon after the migration of Aryans from north India, they propagate the Sanskrit theories like *Manusmriti*. C.Achyuta Menon’s Cochin state manual quotes “the Aryan colonisation of southern India was affected not by the force of arms but by the arts of peace” again he adds “they become the ‘fathers’ of less advanced races...”. The kings donate cultivable lands to the Brahmins, Poets and learned men. The Nambootiris also acted as the *Uralars* of the temple and managed all the temple property. Thus

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34 *Unnitiri and Embrantiri* are the two castes with prefix *tiri* and *Nambiatiri* a title given to warrior chieftains.

35 According to legend Parasurama created *Keralabhumi* (Land of Kerala) and gave it as a gift to the Brahmins of the sixty four gramams (villages).

36 C A Innes, *op. cit*, p.25.

37 C Achyuta Menon, *op. cit*, p.42.

38 *Uralars* means trusty of temple in Travancore.
they kept vast areas of land under their custody, as *Brahmaswam*\(^{39}\) and *Devaswam*\(^{40}\) but earn the right to enjoy both the lands\(^{41}\). Nambootiri should wake up early at about 3.A.M after the bath he should proceed to the temple to perform rituals after that he should read or recite the Vedas, after the sun set he should again resort to the temple till late night. Apart from Nambootiris there are various other Brahmin divisions like Pattars, Agnihotris, Nambootiripad, Thamburakal, Elayads, Musssads etc. Ambalavasi or temple servant class enjoy all previlages next to Brahmin. Ambalavasi differ from the Brahmins in not wearing punul and in observing pollution for twelve days instead of ten. The prominent Ambalavasi divisions are Pushpakan, Pu-Nambi, Nambissans, Pattarunnis or Unnis and their traditional occupation is chiefly flower garlands for the temples. Chakkiyars, Pothuvals, Pisharadis, Variyar, Marars they are the few other castes belong to Ambalavasi category\(^{42}\).

**The Nairs**

In Kerala the Nairs who are below the Brahmins. According to the early census they comprised the fifteen per cent of the total population. As observed by K.M.Panicker, ‘the Nairs were not a caste but a race, for many of the customs and traditions such as marriage,

\(^{39}\) Properties belonged to Brahmins.

\(^{40}\) Properties belonged to God.

\(^{41}\) M Nisar, Meena Kandasamy, *op.cit*, p.15.

inheritance, art of war fare, serpent worship, ancestor worship, art form etc which distinguished from other Malayali population\textsuperscript{43}. C.Achyuta Menon claims that the Nairs as the branch of Naga tribe pointing the similarity of the names and common practise of the serpent worship. Durate Barbosa on his account says ‘the Nairs are gentry and have no other duty than to carry on war, and they continually carry their arms with them’. They all live with the kings and some of them with the other lords, relations of the kings\textsuperscript{44}. Generally they avoid trade, commerce and occupation involving manual labour claiming lacking of dignity. But some of them employed as accountants and clerks in the service of the naduvazhis. The portuguese employed them as Changatams (suicide squad) charged with duty of defending with their lives any person or property entrusted to their charge\textsuperscript{45}. Nagam Aiyya observes the appearance of the well nourished Nair... men keep a small tuft of hair hanging in friend, tied into a knot which is thrown behind or on the side, quite similar to the Tamil Brahmin while women have long black hair growing luxuriantly which they keep neat and orderly by constant bathing, rubbing of oil using comb\textsuperscript{46}.

\textsuperscript{43} K.M.Panicker, \textit{A History of Kerala -1498-1801}, The Annamalai University, Annamalainagar, 1960, p.10.
\textsuperscript{44} C.Achyuta Menon, \textit{op. cit}, p.43.
\textsuperscript{45} A Sreedhara Menon, \textit{op. cit}, p. 120.
The word ‘Nair’ was said to be derived from the word ‘Nayakar’—True Leader as the community was mainly served as army personal. The army of Nairs are known as ‘Nayar Pada’ where pada means army. Even after India got independence, they formed a good percentage of the Indian army. There existed a lot of sub groups based on occupation and native places. Nairs followed join family system called ‘Tharavadu’. Men gave respect to their mothers and their elder sisters whom they treat as mothers. In practice the senior women enjoyed privileges in the Taravad and the Karanavar was the son or younger brother of the senior women. Nairs followed Marumakkattayam, the matrilineal system of inheritance\(^{47}\). Nair women managed domestic affairs in their Tharavadu and also had significant role in the religious performance\(^{48}\).

The Ezhavas

The Ezhavas were the next major community among the outcastes in Kerala. In fact the Ezhavas is the single majority caste in the Hindu community. They were also known as Thiyyas\(^{49}\).


C. Achyuta Menon in his Cochin State Manual, points out that the Ezhavas might have migrated from Sri Lanka during the third or fourth century A.D. The name ‘Ezhava’ became popular during the ninth century A.D. The term ‘Ezhavan’ is mentioned in Tanjavur inscriptions of Raja Raja Chola. The traditional occupation of Ezhavas was to plant and rear coconut trees and to gather its produce. Many of them were employed as guards in the royal army. Majority of the Ezhavas were tenant formers or free agricultural labourers. Some Ezhavas were involved in weaving and ship making. Ezhavas were subject to untouchability. The upliftment and social upgrade was made among the Ezhavas by the great sage Sri. Narayanan Guru. Other castes like Viswakarma includes Kollans (Blacksmith), gold smith, also scheduled in the same social status of Ezhavas.

**The Nadars**

Nadars were the prominent caste in Travancore particularly South Travancore. Robert Cladwell tried to establish the Nadars as

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50 C. Achyuta Menon, *op. cit*, p.43.
52 See more details in the chapter social awakening of women in Kerala.
53 *Kaniyan* is a Malayalam corruption of ganika which means an astrologer or fortune teller. (K. E. Verghes, *Slow flows the Pampa – Socioeconomic changes in a Kuttanad Village in Kerala*, concept publishing company, New Delhi, 1982, p.73).
emigrants from the northern coast of Ceylon. The position of the Nadars before the advent of the Christian missionaries was miserable. They were not allowed to worship in the temples. They did free labour to the government called Oolium. The Nadar women were much subjugated and ill-treated by the upper caste. Education was completely forbidden to them till the missionary started schools in Kerala. So the work of the Christian missionaries attracted the Nadars to a great extent.

The Mukkuvas

Mukkuvans, a caste of fishermen who live in the coastal areas of Kerala. Earlier Mukkuvas followed Marumakkattayam in the North and Makkattayam in the South. Some scholars claims that Mukkuvas probably have migrated from East coast of Tamil Nadu to Kerala. Most of the members of this community follow Roman Catholics due to the missionary activities. In some families the husband is Christian while the wife be Hindu and vice versa, but religion is no barrier to the harmonious family life. In some parts the Mukkuvas are called as Arayans. In caste hierarchy Mukkuvans

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55 Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle, October,1820, p.439.
rank below the Tiyyas\textsuperscript{57}. In early days Arayans suffered many disabilities, like Ezhavas they were also untouchables and were not allowed to use the river in front of the temple either for fishing or for passage\textsuperscript{58}.

The Pulayas

The Pulayas were untouchables of the lowest order and for centuries their work was mainly confined to paddy fields. They were expert in agricultural work. Pulayan is derived from the word Pula (Pollution) in some parts of Kerala Pulayas is called as Cheruman\textsuperscript{59}. Pulayas are the aborigines of the Kerala but later they were isolated from the mainstream community at the bottom end of the caste system in Kerala. They are said to be divided into thirty nine sub-castes like Kanakka Cherumans, Pula Cherumans, Roli Cheruamans, Kudans etc\textsuperscript{60}. Ayyankali, the popular social reformer worked for the upliftment of the Pulayas\textsuperscript{61}.

Like Pulayas, parayas were also aborigines of Kerala. In due course of time parayas were subdued to inferior caste. The name is perhaps derived from Para, Drum as it is usually the Parayas the

\begin{enumerate}
\item C.A Innes, \textit{op.cit}, p.126.
\item Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society, Volume 38, p.298.
\item K.E.Verghes, \textit{op.cit}, pp.79 – 80.
\item C.A Innes, \textit{op.cit}, p.133.
\item For more details see chapter Social awakening of women in Kerala.
\end{enumerate}

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drummers in various ceremonies\textsuperscript{62}. Their position was similar to the Chandalas of North India, their main occupations are basket making and agricultural labour. The Nayadis, Kurubans, Kuricchiyans, are some other degraded castes in Kerala\textsuperscript{63}.

Although a great many spheres of life in modern Kerala are little influenced by caste, most marriages are nevertheless arranged within the caste. This is in part because most people live in rural communities and because the arrangement of marriages is a family activity carried out through existing networks of kinship and caste.

\textbf{Religion}

The Kerala is a confluence place of religions. In addition to the native religions like Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, the foreign religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam also found here a congenial soil\textsuperscript{64}. The people of ancient Kerala followed Dravidian practices without any religious philosophy. According to R.C. Majumdar, “Dravidian speaking peoples perhaps excelled the Aryans, and in any case they must be regarded as partners of the Aryans in building up the great structure known as Hinduism”\textsuperscript{65}. The advent of

\textsuperscript{62} C.A Innes, \textit{op.cit}, p.134.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, pp.135 – 137.

\textsuperscript{64} A.Sreedhara Menon, \textit{op.cit}, p.83.

the Aryans made tremendous change in the society. Aryan philosophy with Hindu base flourished in Kerala. They introduced customs and rules related to religion, caste, family etc as followed in the north India. In due course of time the social situation of the region started to deteriorate. Jainism flourished during the third century B.C. and prevailed as a popular religion. Buddhism also had its deep roots in Kerala but both religions started to deteriorate during the revival of the Hinduism.

**The Hinduism**

Hinduism flourished in South India from time immemorial with numerous practices like worshiping natural gods like snake, trees, sun etc. the immigration of the Aryans to South India a moulded the concepts of Hinduism with various theories and rituals. During the Sangam age Hinduism becomes the prominent religion of the people. But the advent of Jainism and Buddhism resulted setback to Hinduism. In eighth century Adi Sankara Chariya, who was born in Kalady preached Advaita philosophy which made great revival of Hinduism. But Hinduism failed to retain its position due to various causes like caste system, quarrel between the rulers, external aggression. Major states like Travancore, Cochin and Kozhikode were under Hindu rulers. They gave endowments to the temples and

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67 A.Sreedhara Menon, *op.cit*, p .90.
Brahmins. According to the 2011 census figures Hindus comprise 56.2 per cent.

**The Jainism**

The Jain religion entered into Kerala during the third century B.C. when Chandra Gupta Maurya, the great Mauryan emperor abdicated his throne and came down to Sravana Belgola in Mysore accompanied by the saint Bhadrabahu. They introduced the Jain religion in South India. The old Jain shrine in a natural rock at cave at Kallil near Perumbavoor, Jain temple at Sulthan Bathery, Jain inscriptions of Kadambas and Hoysalas at Wayanad and Jain temple at Chitharal remain as the proof of the hold that Jainism had on the people in the ancient past. Vikramaditya Varaguna (885 – 925), the Ay King and Bhutalavira Udaya Marthanda (1516-1535), the Venad King gave lands and gifts for the Jain temples. According to the scholars later many of the Jain temples had been transformed as Hindu temples.\(^{68}\)

**The Buddhism**

Like Jainism, Buddhism also had base in Kerala in ancient period. The Tamil works of the Sangam age contains several references about the missionaries in South India. Many prominent Hindu temples of the present day like the Kurumba Bhgavathy

\(^{68}\) *Ibid*, pp.84 – 85.
temple. The Paliyam copper plate of the Ay King Vikramaditya Varaguna shows that the Buddhist enjoyed some royal patronage even in the tenth century. There are evidences about Buddhist Viharas containing schools and colleges in many parts of Kerala. The idol of Buddha at Mavelikara shows the clear roots and importance of Buddhist religion in Kerala. The decline of the Buddhism started in the eighth century with the revival of the Hindu religion. The Judaism

The Jews had platform in Kerala from very early days. According to tradition they came to the Kerala in 68 A.D in order to escape from religious persecution at home. Like the Christians the Jewish also gained many favours from the rulers of Kerala. The famous Jewish Copper Plate Grant of King Baskara Ravi Varman dated thousand A.D granted several rights and privileges to the Jewish chief, Joseph Rabban. They concentrated on Mattancherry, a place near Cochin. After the formation of the Jewish state of Israel in May 1948, the Jewish population in Kerala migrated to Israel. According to the census of 1991 there are only about a hundred and twenty Jews in Kerala.

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70 *Ibid*, p. 95.
The Christianity

Christianity is one of the popular religions in Kerala. Christianity had its roots even before it became popular in Europe. According to sources, Apostle St. Thomas landed at Malankara, a place near Kodungalloor in the middle of the first century A.D. He established seven churches and converted many including Nambuthiris. The early Christian community earned the respect of the rulers and the people. The privileges specified in the copper-plates grants given to them by King Vira Raghava Chakravarthi and Sthanu Ravi Guptha prove it. The grants are still preserved at Kottayam which dates back to 774 and 824 A.D respectively. In the eighth century an American merchant, Thomas Cana, said to have formed a colony of four hundred Christians. Since the advent of St. Thomas, Christians were found in the coastal region of the peninsular India without establishing churches and baptism. The real beginning of Christianity was marked by the advent of the Portuguese in the fifteenth century. When the Portuguese arrived in India, they try to subjugate the Syrian Christians who were already in Malabar region into roman fold.

The spread of Christianity was accelerated after the advent of the Europeans at the end of the fifteenth century. In the beginning of the 19th century The London Missionary Society, a London based protestant missionary started its work in Travancore. Ringeltaube, Rev.Charles Mead, Rev.James Emylyn, worked in South Travancore made yeomen service for the upliftment of the common people and introduced western education in south Travancore. The CMS mission which was active in Kottayam started their service by setting up a college in Kottayam. Among the CMS missionaries who did pioneering work in Kottayam, Bailey, Backer and Fenn deserves special mention. The Basel German Evangelical Mission introduced western education in Malabar region. In fact the Christian church became one of the well established institutions in the country. Now there are many folds among the Christians in Kerala like Marthoma Syrian church, Jacobite Syrian, the Anglican Church (now part of Churches of south India), the Roman Catholic Church. In addition there are also a number of minor missionaries and churches deriving inspiration from some foreign church or others. According to the 2011 census figures 19 per cent of the population follows Christianity.

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73 A.Sreedhara Menon, op.cit, pp 94 – 96.
The Islam

The spread of Islam in Kerala trace back to a very early date. Islam came to India via the Malabar Coast. Kerala had trade contact with Arabian countries from the early centuries of Christian era. During trade contact with the Arabs, it is very probable the religious leaders also accompanied them and brought Islam to Kerala during the seventh century A.D\textsuperscript{74}. The gold coins of Ummayya Khalifs (A.D.661 – 750) unearthed from Kothamangalam confirms it\textsuperscript{75}. Sheikh Zainuddin’s, Lethukuthula Mujahedeen of sixteenth century A.D mentions the last of the Cheraman Perumals left for Mecca and accepted Islam\textsuperscript{76}. The successor of the Cheraman Perumal, Mabeli was also converted to Islam as Mohammed Ali. He became the first Sultan Ali Raja of Arakal, which was the only Muslim dynasty in Kerala\textsuperscript{77}. According to C.Achyuta Menon, ‘the early Muhammadans appeared to have been the offspring of the union between the Arab traders who would naturally come without their women and the

\textsuperscript{74} S M Michael, \textit{Culture and Urbanization}, Inter-India publications, New Delhi, 1989, p. 422.

\textsuperscript{75} Murkot Ramunny, \textit{op.cit}, p.16.

\textsuperscript{76} P.K.Gopalakrishnan, \textit{Keralathinde Samskarika Charitram},(Malayalam), State Institute of Languages, Thiruvananthapuram, 1974, p.295.

\textsuperscript{77} U.Mohammed, \textit{Educational Empowerment of Kerala Muslims – A socio Historical perspective}, Indian Council for Historical Research, New Delhi, 2007, p.15.
women of the lower caste of the Hindus. Islam become popular during the ninth century A.D, many indigenous people started to follow Islam including one Samutiri who also adopted Islam. The rulers of Cochin, Travancore and Kozhikode gave concessions and grants for the Muslims. The Zamorin’s navy was manned by Muslims. Muslims follow the holy book Quran. The Muslims are very strict in observance of the religious rules. The priest is known by the name of Kazi, who is the head of the Jamat. In Kerala both Shiah and Sunni sects are popular. Muslims follow the sharia law, the religious law of Islam particularly the personnel laws like marriage, divorce, dress codes etc. the 2011 census figures shows 24.7 per cent of the people of the Kerala follows Islam.

Kerala is about one percent of the total area of India and around 3 percent of the population. Kerala is a confluence place of various religions. Kerala developed a distinct culture of religious harmony giving importance to each religion and castes. People celebrate Onam irrespective of religion. Kerala has great influence in the annals of the history of India particularly from the advent of the Europeans.

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78 C.Achyuta Menon, *op.cit*, p.293.
80 C.Achyuta Menon, *op.cit*, p.293.