CHAPTER I

THE SETTING AND THE PEOPLE

Kerala, with its lush green forests, enchanting stretch of backwaters and undulating contours of the majestic Western Ghats, is considered as one of the most beautiful states in India. Spread over 38.864 sq.kms, Kerala covers 1.03% of the total area of India. The 1991 Census placed the state’s population at 29011237 - 3.445 percent of the country’s total population. The population density of Kerala in 1991, at 747 persons per sq km, was the highest for any state and exceeded only by the four Union territories 1.

The state of Kerala was born on Nov. 1, 1956 with the unification of Travancore-Cochin and Malabar regions. At present there are 14 districts, 197 towns, of which 65 are statutory towns (3 Corporations, 59 municipalities, a cantonment and 2 townships) and 132 non municipal towns. Among the three cities, Cochin (U.A.) was the first to claim the status of a metropolis. Situated on the West Coast of India, Cochin (locally known as Kochi) is located in Ernakulam district of Kerala, which lies between north latitudes 9° 41 and 10° 17 and east, longitudes 76° 10 and 77° 01. Bluish green lagoons, the picturesque sea front, and wooded islets, present Cochin a rare scenic beauty. No wonder Cochin is known as the ‘Queen of the Arabian Sea’.
Etymology

In Malayalam, 'Kochu' means small and many people believe that Cochin, derives its name from that word\(^2\). It is also believed that Cochin's earlier name was Kochazhi, the small sea. But in Kerala Mahalmayam, it is stated that the word Cochin is derived from the Sanskrit word, 'Balapuri', a small town. Another version according to Sri. Achutha Menon is that the word Cochin is derived from the Chinese word 'Conchu' which means the seat of King\(^3\). Anyway, even before the 14th Century, this area was known as Cochin. Recently the city's name was changed to Kochi.

Genesis

The municipal towns of Ernakulam, Fort Cochin and Mattancherry were merged in 1967 along with the Willingdon Island and four panchayats (Palluruthy, Vannala, Vytila and Edapally) and the small islands of Gundu Deepu and Ramanthuruthu to form the City Corporation of Cochin\(^4\). The new born Corporation extended over an area of 94.88 sq.km.

The Internal Structure

The internal structure of Cochin Corporation consists of three blocks of land. Edacochin, Mattancherry and Ernakulam consist of one block, Willingdon Island...
another, and Ernakulam with its interior parts form the third mass of land. These three are separated by the Ernakulam Kayal. At present there are 50 wards for the Corporation of Cochin which are spread on the above mentioned three blocks of land.

Willingdon Island, where the aerodrome had been formed with the material dredged up to make the harbour suitable for larger vessels, is also the headquarters of the Southern Naval Command. The island is linked to the mainland by road and rail. There are ferry boat services operating between Cochin and Willingdon Island, Ernakulam, Bolgatty and some other places.

Mattancherry and Fort Cochin, the commercial capital of Cochin State, situated on the backwaters, opposite to Ernakulam, covers an area of two and a half sq. miles, and is the centre of trade. It contains a spacious old palace of quaint Dutch design, the Jewish Synagogue, the St. Francis Church, the Konkani temple, the Gujarati temple, etc. This area has more ethnic diversity due to its commercial importance, and it is here that the Gujarati colonies are found.

Ernakulam, the capital of the former state of Cochin lies facing the Willingdon Island across the backwaters. It had its first railway line in 1901 and since then has grown in population and importance. The Cochin Shipyard, which was started in 1976, is located here and produces ocean going vessels. The chief public buildings and institutions in Ernakulam are High Court, Corporation Office, Darbar Hall, General Hospital,
Greater Cochin Development Authority Office etc. Of late, many hotels, cinema theatres, private hospitals, shopping complexes, offices of various private firms, multi storeyed flats etc. have come up. The Cochin Town Planning Trust was converted into the Greater Cochin Development Authority by a Presidential Ordinance in 1975. The body’s development scheme has covered the neighbouring municipal towns of Alwaye, Parur and some panchayats. This has shifted the development to fringe areas of the city. At present the urban agglomeration of Kochi ranks among the larger metropolises of India.

**Demographic Features**

Cochin contains 1.946% of Kerala’s population. There are 283,432 males and 281,157 females in Corporation area, contributing to a total population of 564,589. A unique feature of Kerala is its sex ratio. When most of the states of India have less females per 1000 males, Kerala is the only state in India which has more number of females than males in its population composition. Throughout the country the urban areas have less females than their rural composition. In Kerala also urban areas reflect this feature. Cochin is having 991 females per 1000 males as against the all India sex ratio of 929 females per 1000 males. Thus a fair balance between sexes is found in Cochin city compared to national and regional trends.

When compared with other urban centres of Kerala, Cochin Corporation has higher literacy. As against the national rate of 52.11% literacy and the regional rate of 90.59%,
Kochi has cent percent literacy. This tremendous success of total literacy was achieved by Ernakulam district in 1990 itself, by launching a mass movement for total literacy known as ‘Operation Floodlight’.

Cochin has always made progress in Health and Family Welfare. The birth rate is 17% per thousand, as against the Kerala trend of 18.1% per thousand and national average of 29.3. Similarly death rate is 5.97 as against 6 per thousand of Kerala state and national average of 9.8. Cochin is way head of national goal of achieving birth rate of 21 per thousand and death rate of per thousand by 2000 A.D.

**Urban Features**

Cochin is a class I city with a population of over 5 lakhs. Table no. 2.1 gives the growth of population of Cochin from 1901 to 1991.
### Table No. 1.1: Growth of Population of Cochin Corporation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Population Increase/decrease</th>
<th>Percentage of decade variation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>61236</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>564589</td>
<td>+51340</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 1991 Primary Census Abstract for Ernakulam

As could be seen from the table, Cochin city has grown in size steadily from 1901 to 1961. It has set the declining population trend in early 1970s.

One striking peculiarity of Kochi is its high density. Census figures indicate that the mean gross density of 5409 per km (1981) is replaced by 5963 per km in 1991. This high density indicates the pressure on land and other natural resources.
Another characteristic feature of urbanization is the heterogeneity of the population in terms of age, occupation, education, religion, caste etc. Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes of the city runs to 20564 which is 3.64 percent of the total population of the city. There is only one ward in the city which is devoid of Scheduled Castes.

By and large, Cochin city enjoys a prominent place in Kerala. It is a port city and the administrative headquarters of the district Ernakulam. Facing the lagoons, it is linked to the entire coastal stretch of Kerala through these waters. The potentials of a natural harbour and the continuous chain of lagoons parallel to the sea, attracted many traders from diverse countries. Over the years, many travellers and merchants have visited Cochin for trade purpose and at present it is one of the prime commercial cities in India. It is a cosmopolitan city and has accepted different strains of culture and lifestyle into its fold. At present Cochin portrays an astonishing blend of many cultures that have flourished here.

HISTORY

The history of Cochin can be traced to 1341, when a great flood silted up the seaport of muziris and created the natural harbour of Cochin. The first historical account of Cochin was given by Ma Huan, a Chinese traveller, who visited Kochi in 1409. Very soon Mattancherry emerged as a busy settlement. Its advantage was that it provided safe anchorage to county crafts in all seasons. At the end of the 15th century, due to many
internal strifes, the then Cochin ruler accepted the Zamorin of Kozhicode's rule and even paid him annual tribute. Thus Cochin became dependent on Kozhicode.

From 16th Century, Cochin became a coveted area of Europeans, who came to the port in search of spices. In 1550, the Portughese Admiral Gabriel came to Cochin, and met with a friendly reception from the Raja of Cochin and returned with a large cargo of pepper. In 1502 Vasco-da-Gama visited Cochin and he was followed very soon by another Portugese by the name Alburquerque. The Portugese, though they first landed in Calicut, expanded their trading activities towards the South and Cochin became one of their main trading centres. The first fortress by Europeans in India christened 'Manuel Kotta' or Fort Manuel was constructed by Alburquerque.

In 1510, the St. Francis Xaviour Church was built in 1510 and by tradition this is the oldest existing European Church in India. The church plates are valuable and interesting. Vasco-da-gama was originally burried here. The Portugese also established a small fort called 'Fort Orange' in 1661.

The South West Coast of India had contacts with Middle east from time immemorial. There is evidence to show that Phinesians, Arabs, Syrians and Jews had reached the maritime cities like Kozhikode and Cangannore which were the main ports then. It is believed that St. Thomas, one of the Apostles of Christ reached Cangannore in AD 52, and converted some families into Christianity. Thus the Portugese who came to Cochin,
found Jewish colonies in Cochin and North Paravoor and a flourishing local Christian community.

Alburquerque encouraged intermarriage between Portugese and natives. Portugese style of dressing and living prevailed in Cochin in those days. There were frequent parties, ball room dancing, games, and free mingling of sexes. Many of those Portugese festivals such as ‘Moonlight Oppos’ are survivals of those days. The fall of the Portugese in Cochin came with the take over of the Fort by Dutch in 1663. But they remodelled the town, building substantial European houses. They also converted the Cathedral of Santa-Cruz into a warehouse. The anticatholic policy of Dutch made them unpopular. Trade was the major interest of the Dutch and they gave a new lease of life to Kerala trade. Several new industries thrive like salt farming, dying and printing.

Background of Gujaratis in Kochi

Majority of Gujaratis (99%) live in their own state of Gujarat or in the neighbouring state of Maharashtra which until the early sixties had been joined together in a single state. About 400,000 Gujaratis live outside their state as merchants and businessmen. Of them about 4000 Gujaratis are settled in the city of Kochi.

FACTORS FOR MIGRATION FROM GUJARAT-

The forces that compelled the Gujaratis to migrate are varied and diverse. Both
internal and external factors have contributed to the exodus of Gujaratis to other states.

Internal factors

Political instability, natural calamities and certain socio-economic conditions of Gujarat are some internal factors which compelled many Gujaratis to leave their homestead in 18th and 19th centuries.

In the second half of 19th Century, Gujarat witnessed political instability. There was endless struggle for power between the Muggals, the Maratas and the local chiefs. Surat which was emerging as a trading centre at that time, was subjected to repeated invasion by the Maratas. Local people suffered under the strains of war, and frequent change of political rule. But unlike the usual conquerors, the Maratas had no intention of establishing a strong administration in Gujarat. On the otherhand, they were satisfied with their share of plunder. Looting, plunder and exploitation became common. Thus “from 1664 to 1757 a period of Dark Night set in” and peace and prosperity retreated. What was left of Gujarat was chaos and confusion and a ruined economy.

This was also the period when nature was most ruthless to Gujaratis. Natural calamities struck one after another, leaving them miserable and panic stricken. Severe famines hit the province in the years 1719, 1732, 1747. There was complete failure of crops in 1899 and 1900. In 1837, ‘a great fire’ broke out in Surat which consumed
an extent of ten miles, and 5373 houses. Flooding of rivers caused great damage in the years 1776, 1782, 1820 and 1822. All these could not crush the mercantile spirit of Gujaratis. Berefit of shelter and security, many Gujaratis sought the opportunities presented by other states.

In addition to the above mentioned internal factors, certain other external factors also played a crucial role in the migration of Gujaratis. The industrial revolution in England, and advent of European communities into India posed new challenges to Gujarati businessmen, who were already slogging under the strains of political instability and natural calamities. Failing to resist the cut-throat competition of European communities, many Gujarati traders shifted their business to other suitable places.

Advent in Kerala

It is believed that Gujaratis migrated to Kerala some 900 years ago, and that they first landed in the port city of Calicut. But most of the Gujaratis at present settled in Kochi are said to have arrived after 1775. However there is evidence to prove that there was a steady flow of Gujaratis to Kochi after 1865. Most of these early migrants came from Cutch, Saurashtra regions and Bombay and chose the port towns of Alleppy, Calicut and Kochi to settle down. Gujarati migration continued to Kerala during the early part of 19th Century. The early traders acted as a resource group supporting later migrants. Unlike the other early merchants who visited Kerala, Gujaratis confined to their business
activities and stayed in the warehouses where their goods were stored. Very seldom did they enter into marital alliances with the local Malayalees. In 1841 the Raja of Cochin granted them a piece of land in Mattancherry where they built warehouses and settlements unhindered by the interference of local Malayalees. Thus Mattancherry became the center of their business activity. Gradually a Gujarati colony developed there around the New road, Lalan Road and Palace Road area. (A map of Cochin Corporation showing the Gujarati settlement is given in page no. 18). They settled keeping intact all their social customs and traditions. They started their own school, associations, temples and preserved all their age old traditions and practices.

External factors

In addition to the above mentioned internal factors, certain external factors contributed to Gujarati migration on a large scale. The industrial revolution in England and the expansion of British trade throughout the world created opportunities for the emergence of new markets in India. The Gujaratis, with their inborn trait for trade were only ready to grab the new trade opportunities presented to them.

The regional characteristic of the host society of Kochi and the economic activity of the people there at that time were congenial for Gujarati entrepreneurs to venture their business activities. As a port city, Kochi offered immense opportunities for export business. Kochi had the advantage of adequate facilities for the storage of goods and their
exportation. Moreover the Raja of Cochin granted the Gujaratis a piece of land in Mattancherry in 1841, for constructing their own warehouses. This lured many a Gujaratis to settle down in Kochi. Kochi had already attracted European traders and export of Indian goods surged. As most of the Gujarati traders indulged in export business, their quantum of trade activity increased. This attracted Gujarati merchants to come and settle in Kochi.

During that time farming was the main occupation of the local people in Kochi. Not many Keralites were inclined towards industry and trade. This reduced competition for the Gujaratis and they found in Kochi an ideal place for business. Another unique feature of the socio-political scene in Kerala at that point of time was that despite the steady influx of people with widely separated cultural backgrounds, there was complete harmony between them and the local populace. All immigrants were warmly received, and were speedily absorbed into the larger Kerala community.

**Basic Characteristics**

The Gujaratis in Kerala are concentrated on the port cities of Kozhicode, Allappuzha and Kochi. The strength of the community in Kerala may be about 12000, of which about 4250 are settled in Kochi. Roughly there are about 2510 adult Gujaratis in Kochi. Majority of them are settled in the exclusive area of Mattancherry where they live as a self contained community. Some 150 people are settled in Ernakulam side of Cochin.
City and they are distributed in areas like Giri Nagar, Panampally Nagar and some other isolated places. There is a remarkable difference in the life style and outlook of Gujaratis settled in the two localities of Mattancherry and Ernakulam. Those Gujaratis settled in Mattancherry area are more tradition bound and confine to their own group, while those in Ernakulam are more exposed to the ways of Keralites.

**Domestic life**

Gujaratis retain the traditional joint family system to a large extent. Some of the families are very large in size and include more than fifteen members in the same household. Majority of the married sons with their wife and children live along with their parents and grandparents. In some cases nuclear families are also found especially among the highly educated. But the number of such families are limited.

Generally women remain as housewives and dual career families are rare. Even when the women are highly educated, they rarely enter the occupational sphere. In the sample selected, there are two instances of women qualified as lawyers, but remaining as housewives.

Most of the family members follow their traditional family business and some business are owned jointly by families.
Education

Gujaratis have given low priority to education. However the present generation of migrants have shown remarkable change in their attitude towards education. Most of the male members have qualified up to SSLC or taken a degree. At present there are some who hold PhD degree and professional degrees.

Trading Community

Gujaratis are basically an adventurous and risk loving trading community, and they have improved their prospects by engaging in trade and commerce. Kerala provided immense opportunities for export trade of various hill produce items such as pepper, tea, turmeric, coir, rubber etc. Many Gujaratis are engaged in such transactions. Apart from import-export business, Gujaratis have shown their talent in other fields of business such as textile, stationary, hardwares and sweets. The field of industry is also not left alone by Gujaratis. The first printing press in Kerala was started by a Gujarati, Sir Devji Bhimji. There are some textile mills like Asoka Textiles, Alwaye, owned by the Gujaratis. An established Tyre factory called Premier Tyres was maintained previously by Gujaratis. There are some other Gujaratis who are specialising in saw mill industry and coconut oil mills. There are also some who are carrying on business in the production of cycle spares, stainless steel, furniture and gold ornaments. A few others act as shipping agents and brokers. Of late many have focussed their attention on diamond cutting and stock exchange. On the whole the aptitude of Gujaratis for trade is remarkable.
NOTES


5. *The Kerala Pageant*, Kottayam, M.M. Publications p.31


17. T. Jamal Mohamed p.12-30
CHAPTER II