

## CHAPTER-I

### HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF KOLLAM

The geographical position of Kollam was conducive to become a major maritime port of South India during the medieval period. Kollam had been developing as a major maritime trading centre since 9<sup>th</sup> century. The town, Kollam is also called Kurakkeni Kollam.<sup>1</sup> There is another Kollam called Pantalayani Kollam in northern Kerala. Quilon is the anglicized form of Kollam. So in the modern period Kollam is called as Quilon.

At present Kollam is the headquarters of Kollam district and Kollam taluk of the state of Kerala. The town has an area of 6.3 sq. miles. The location of the town is between 8°50 North Latitude and 76°35 East Longitude.<sup>2</sup> Kollam is situated 70 KM north from Trivandrum.<sup>3</sup> Thankassery near Kollam was a main Portuguese settlement.<sup>4</sup> Great civilizations of the past had a Kollam connection because of the international port. During the bygone days, the port was an important hub of international trade.<sup>5</sup> That importance continued irrespective of political changes.

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<sup>1</sup> *Annual Report of the Archaeological Department-Travancore State for the Year 1920-1921 A.D. (1096 ME)*, Trivandrum, 1922, p.54.

<sup>2</sup> A. Sreedhara Menon, *Gazetteers of India, Kerala, Quilon*, Trivandrum, 1964, p.684.

<sup>3</sup> P. Bhaskaranunni, *Kollathinte Carithram*, (mal.), Kollam, 1994, p.12

<sup>4</sup> Lieutenants Ward and Conner, *Memoir of the Survey of the Travancore and Cochin States*, Vol.2, Trivandrum, 1994, p.72.

<sup>5</sup> *The Hindu*, Friday, October, 19, 2007, p.4.

The centre portion of this town is divided into regular bread streets, lined with bazaars, about its centre and the intersection of two wide streets are the parsee shops ranged on the either side; on the right side of the street running south from it is the daily markets, and that turning East four furlongs is the *Vulleachudda* or big bazaar; and is the busiest part of the city.<sup>6</sup> At the junction of the street, there is a range of tiled bazaars, called Chinnacudday. Kilikollur near Kollam was a centre of weaving.<sup>7</sup>

The district shares the boundaries from eastern sea to the district of Tirunelveli, South-Trivandrum to north Aleppy and Pathanamthitta districts. Kollam covers an area of 2,491 sq.kms.<sup>8</sup> The district of Kollam was formed in 1949 with 12 taluks.<sup>9</sup> They are Kollam, Kottarakkara, Pathanapuram, Chenkotta, Kunnathur, Pathanathitta, Karthikapally, Karunagapally, Mavelikkara, Thiruvalla, Ambalappuzha and Cherthala. In 1956, Chenkotta became a part of Madras state. In 1957 Alappuzha district was formed with Cherthala, Ambalappuzha, Karthikapally, Mavelikkara, Chengannur and Thiruvalla taluks. In 1983, the district of Pathanamthitta came into existence and now Kollam has only five taluks- Kollam, Kottarakkara, Pathanapuram, Kunnathur and Karunagappally.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Lieutenants Ward and Conner, *Op.cit.*, p.72.

<sup>7</sup> *Kerala Society Papers*, Vol.I&II, Series. 1., Travancore Dynastic Records, Trivandrum, 1997, p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> P. Bhaskaranunni, *Op.cit.*, p.13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

The District has 13 blocks, 69 panchayats, 1 corporation, 3 municipalities and 104 villages.<sup>11</sup> Aryankavu in the Western Ghats is the easternmost point in the district on the national highway. The Shendurunny wildlife sanctuary, 66 Kms from Kollam, is situated on the southern part of the Western Ghats.

The geographical features of the town played a major role in its development as a major maritime trading centre. The presence of mud banks along the shores of Kollam rendered safe anchorage of ships.

On the basis of the geographical conditions the district is divided into midland, highland and coastal area. The most important fishing centre Neendakara is situated on the north of Kollam. Coastal area was famous for coir manufacturing. Midland area is famous for agriculture like coconut, cashew, pepper, rice and tapioca. Highland is known for rubber and teak. Another two important factors are Aryankavu pass and Palaruvi waterfall. The district has two important rivers, Kalladayar and Ithikkarayar and three famous lakes viz. Ashtamudikayal, Paravurkayal, and Sasthamkottakayal (Fresh Water Lake). The town is situated between the sea and the backwaters of Ashtamudi.

Punalur paper mill and Punalur plywood factories are situated on the coast of Kallada. Ashtamudikayal has eight branches and Kollam town is situated on the coast of southern branch. The Eastern coast of Ashtamudi is famous for clay. Chambranikoti is one of the branches of Ashtamudi, Chambrani (small ship). Sasthankotta fresh water lake is situated in Kunnathur taluk. The eight branches of Ashtamudi had enabled Kollam to have commercial connections with interior

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

villages.<sup>12</sup> The situation of Kollam was conducive to have easy ways of communication with other countries, both by sea and land; two roads which lead into Travancore by the Arambully and Ariankavu passes meet at it.<sup>13</sup> Kollam is known for cashew processing and coir manufacturing. It is also a prominent tourist destination.

There is another Kollam in Kerala, Pantalayani Kollam of Koyilandy. Koyilandy is the coastal taluk of Calicut district. According to the revenue records there are 36 villages in Koyilandy taluk.<sup>14</sup> Pantalayani is one among them. Pantalayani Kollam comprises an area of 537.96 acres with a small market. It is 26 km. north of Calicut on the NH 17. It figures as a place of commercial importance in medieval Arab, Chinese and European accounts.<sup>15</sup> Medieval archaeological evidence in the form of Chinese porcelain and other pottery brought to light corroborate the literary evidence of foreign contacts of Pantalayani Kollam. *Aithiyamala*<sup>16</sup> refers that a group of Vaisyas came here from southern Kollam (Kurakkeni Kollam) and they took rest under an ‘ayini’ tree which has many branches as a *pantal* (shade giving area) So they called it as Pantalayani and later the place was known as Pantalayani Kollam.

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<sup>12</sup>Sivasankaran Nair, *Venadinte Parinamam*, Trivandrum, 1993, p.242; also see P.Bhaskaranunni, *Kollathinte Carithram* (mal.), *Op.cit.*, p.15.

<sup>13</sup> Lieutenants Ward and Conner, *Op.cit.*, p.73.

<sup>14</sup> *Revenue Handbook*, Trivandrum, Institute of Land Management, 2003, p.49.

<sup>15</sup> P.P.Sudhakaran (ed.), *Advances in History*, Calicut, 2005, p.155.

<sup>16</sup> Kottarathil Sankunni, *Aithiyamala* (mal.), Kottayam, Reprint, 1998, p.522.

The present Kollam had a glorious past for which we have to trace back to the pre historic time. Kollam is included in the mainstream of the evolution of human settlement.<sup>17</sup> Prehistoric cultures in Kerala include the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Megalithic, and their occurrences have been recorded from various places in Kollam. Two urn burial sites discovered at Poredam in Kollam gives much insight in to the prehistoric people of ancient Kerala. The cultural evidences obtained from Poredam consist of several red ware and grey ware potteries, black- and red-ware potteries and a few iron implements<sup>18</sup>(see p.238, F.5). Kollam is included in the mainstream of the evolution of human life. Mesolithic implements and wood charcoal etc. are discovered from Tenmalai (Kollam district).<sup>19</sup>

Remains of ancient settlement also have been unearthed from Mangad near Kollam. The discovery of beautiful, etched carnelian beads and iron implements from Mangadu (see p.238, F.6) shows that the people of the era between fifth and first century B.C. were familiar with the technology like smelting. The findings from Mangadu included pottery, burial jars, iron objects, beads, bones and charcoal. The pottery included red ware, black and red ware and dull black ware.<sup>20</sup> This further proves that Kollam occupies a prominent place in the discovery of

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<sup>17</sup> P. Bhaskaranunni, *Op.cit.*, p.12.

<sup>18</sup> P. Rajendran, *Current Science*, Vol. 64, No.3, 10 February, Bangalore, 1993, p.148.

<sup>19</sup> P. Rajendran, *Current Science*, Vol.56, No.6, 20 March , Bangalore, 1987, p.266.

<sup>20</sup> *The Hindu*, Friday, November 1,1991, p.18.

Megalithic or Iron Age cultures of Kerala. Because of this historical importance one cannot omit the process of tracing the history of Kollam since ancient times.

Kollam is a coastal region, and hence it resembles the *Naital Tinai* of the ancient Tamizhakam as depicted in the Tamil anthologies. It was the geographical features of Kollam that enabled the place to develop into a major maritime trading centre. The waxing and waning of ice, transgression and regression of sea etc. have special importance in this regard.

Physiographically, Kollam has been very important throughout history. Pleistocene period is divided into Lower Pleistocene, middle Pleistocene and upper Pleistocene and it lasted from 2 million down to 10000 B.C.<sup>21</sup> The stone age evidences from different parts of Kerala discovered since 1974 authentically prove that the region was well inhabited since the Lower Palaeolithic and continued through middle and upper Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Megalithic, and interior forest still retain primitive tribes who had inherited earlier cultures. During this period sea level had fluctuated to almost 300 ft. During the Pleistocene there were Glacials and during the Glacials sea level had fallen to almost 300 feet due to the waxing of ice (ice formation) and this had taken by drawing water from the sea.

During inter-Glacial due to waning of ice, sea level had increased to almost 300 ft, reaching the former level. This waxing and waning during the Glacials caused for sea-transgression and regression. This had affected all the

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Dr.P.Rajendran, Social Scientist and Archaeologist, Kerala University, Karyavattom, 08.07.2008.

continents particularly the coastal regions. Its evidences are also available in India, particularly in Kerala. Stratigraphical evidences in various parts of coastal Kerala clearly show various segments of stratum, beginning from the top laterite (ferricrete) running 10 to 15 meters in thickness.<sup>22</sup> This formation is very conspicuous in the midlands and the highlands on the coast.

This is underlain by floral fossils which are nothing but floral remains. Its thickness varies from 1-2 metre at various places. Below this formation limestone which consists of molluscas and shells of marine origin is seen. Further down again the fossilised floral horizon of 4-7 metre is seen, below it again a limestone stratum is seen. This stratigraphy clearly indicates the transgression and regression of the sea in this region. The top ferricrete layer forms a single unit except at the very top where recent deposits are found. This ferricrete does not contain any marine deposits, while limestone is found only below the fossilised floral horizon. This floral formation has formed due to the overlying deposits which was later ferricretised or lateritised.

In this context the floral fossils have been dated by Electron Spin Resonance (ESR) and a date of 1.87 million has been obtained. This directly dates the overlying formation.<sup>23</sup> This is the major geomorphologic formation in our midland. Therefore this date gives the geomorphologic history of our present land surface and it does not contain any evidence of marine erosion or deposition. The evidence of transgression is found below the floral fossil in the form of limestone.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

It has been dated by ESR method to 2.35 million. These dates clearly show that the present land surface never had suffered sea transgression or rather it occurred 2.35 million years back and its evidence lies 13 meter below the present surface.

Such limestone formation in Kollam has been noted even 25km in land. This stratigraphical study amply proves the fact that Kerala was well above the present sea level since the last regression and was suitable for human habitation.<sup>24</sup> The stone age evidences from different parts of Kerala discovered since 1974 authentically prove that this region was well inhabited since the lower Palaeolithic and continued through Middle and upper Palaeolithic. Mesolithic, Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Megalithic and the interior forest still retain primitive tribes who had inherited earlier cultures.

Kollam deserves special attention as an ancient settlement region and after centuries it became an emporium of trade. It was one among the major port cities of medieval Kerala. But it was after the decline of Muziris, the port of Cochin and Kollam came into prominence. Muziris is referred to as Murachipattanam in the Valmiki Ramayana, and Muyirikode in the Jewish Copper Plate (see p.240, F.12) of Bhaskara Ravi Varman (1000 A.D). In the early Tamil anthologies the port city is referred to as Muchiri.<sup>25</sup>

Muziris was known in several names as Makotai, Mahodayapuram and Mahodayapattanam.<sup>26</sup> In the Jewish Copper Plates (1000 A.D.) Kodungallur is

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> V.R. Parameswaran Pillai (trans.), *Purananuru*, Song 343, Reprint, Trissur, 1997, p.445.

<sup>26</sup> A. Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, Madras, 1996, p.64.

referred to as Muyirikode and in Vira Raghava Pattayam (1125 A.D.) as Kodumkolor. The Cochin Jews call it Shingli or Singoli.<sup>27</sup> Gustav Oppert identifies Gingaleh with the Shinkala of Abulfeda and Cyncilum of Oderic the Franciscan. Jordanus characterizes it as a kingdom between Calicut and Kollam. Rashiduddin calls it as Jangli and Benjamin of Tudela as Gingala<sup>28</sup>. In modern times the place is known as Kodungallur whose anglicized version is Cranganore.

Cranganore, the Muziris of the ancients was described by Pliny as ‘primum emporium Indiae’. It is described by a contemporary poet as “the thriving town of Muchiri where the beautiful large ships of the Yavana bringing gold come, splashing the white foam in the waters of the Periyar which belongs to Kerala and return lade with pepper”.<sup>29</sup> *Kokasandesam* (prose 76) says that the prosperity of Kodungallur is famous in the fourteen worlds .<sup>30</sup> *Unnulisandesam* (prose-63) speaks about the Roman contact with Kodungallur and the existence of Roman coin (thiramam) and also gives details about toll (chungam).<sup>31</sup> “Muziris”, says Periplus’ author “abounds in ships sent there with cargoes from Arabia and by the Greeks”.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Elkan Nathan Adler (ed.), *Jewish Travellers*, Reprint, New Delhi, 1995, p.372.

<sup>28</sup> Henry Yule & Henri Cordier, (trans. & ed.) *Cathay and the Way Thither*, Vol.II, New Delhi, Revised Edn., 1998, p.133.

<sup>29</sup> C. Achyuta Menon, *The Cochin State Manual*, Reprint, Trivandrum, 1995, p.44.

<sup>30</sup> Elamkulam Kunhan Pillai (ed.), *Kokasandesam* (mal.), Reprint, Kottayam, 1997, p.76.

<sup>31</sup> Sandeepani, *Unnulisandesam* (mal.), Third Edn., Kozhikode, 1999, p.51.

<sup>32</sup> Wilfred H. Schoff, (trans.) *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, New Delhi, 1974, p.44.

The author of Periplus states that the Greek merchants from Egypt brought wine, brass, lead, glass etc. for sale to Muziris and in return purchased pepper, betel, pearls and fine muslins from here.<sup>33</sup> *Unniyaccicaritam* (prose 4), refers about the prosperous town of Kodungallur.<sup>34</sup> References speak that western ships came with gold (see p.236, F.1 & 237) and returned with pepper from Muziris.<sup>35</sup>

In 1341, Periyar was in spate and it washed away the land blocking its approach to the sea. The result was that Cochin became protected by the backwaters and developed into an important harbour while Cranganore declined.<sup>36</sup> Cranganore had declined commercially in the 14<sup>th</sup> century<sup>37</sup> and lost its importance of being the prime pepper exporting port of the eighth century when this position was taken over by Kollam.

Like the Ceras , Colas also had interest in the port of Kollam. The port of Vizhinham (see p.225, Map.3) had threat from Pandyas, because of this the king was in need of another port. At the same time procurement of pepper from Kollam

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<sup>33</sup> *Report on the Administration of the Archaeological Department of Cochin State for the Year 1102 ME (1926-27 AD)*, Ernakulam, 1928, p.9.

<sup>34</sup> Mukhathala Gopalakrishnan Nair,(ed.), *Unniyaccicaritam*, (mal.), Second edn., Trivandrum, 1997, p.19.

<sup>35</sup> Nenmara P. Viswanathan Nair (trans.), *Akananuru* (mal.),Vol.2, song 149, Trissur, 1987, pp.120- 21.

<sup>36</sup> N. Rajendran, *Establishment of British Power in Malabar (1664 to1799)*, Allahabad, 1979, p.3.

<sup>37</sup> A.P.Ibrahim Kunju, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala-Their History and Culture*, Trivandrum, 1989, p.26.

was easier than from Vizhinham.<sup>38</sup> Certain scholars tried to connect Kollavarsha<sup>39</sup> with the foundation of the city of Kollam. But evidences prove that the city of Kollam existed before the starting of Kollavarsha.<sup>40</sup> The importance of Kollvarsha spread in the regions of Madhura, Thirunelveli and Ceylon. Its importance increased in the occasions like marriage.<sup>41</sup>

Since the formation of Kerala society, different religious communities and groups existed, and Kollam was not an exception in this regard. The local Hindus warmly accepted merchants and sailors of other nationalities and the Arabs in turn reciprocated by a non- aggressive policy.<sup>42</sup> It is believed that St. Thomas had introduced Christianity in Travancore and had converted a good number of people into that religion. In the early centuries of Christian era, the Jews, when they faced persecution in their homeland, migrated to Kerala for asylum.<sup>43</sup> Marco Polo testifies to the presence of trading communities of Jews and Christians at Kollam.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> K.Sivasankaran Nair, *Venadinte Parinamam*, *Op.cit.*, p28.

<sup>39</sup> Several scholars are of the opinion that the city of Kollam was founded in 825, and the same year is considered as the beginning of Kollavarsha.

<sup>40</sup> P. Bhaskaranunni, *Op.cit.*, p.33.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24.

<sup>42</sup> Rolland E.Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala*, Madras, 1976, p.41.

<sup>43</sup> K.K.N., Kurup, *The Legacy of Islam*, Kannur, 2006, p.84.

<sup>44</sup> Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, Translated by Aldo Ricci from L.F. Benedetto, New Delhi, Reprint, 1994, p.326.

The rulers of Kerala were sympathetic to those migrants and were good in their heart, and the granting of special privileges and concessions were recorded on copper plates which further shows the generosity and compassion towards the new settlers who belonged to an entirely different religious tradition. The Arab merchants had close familiarity and contact with the coastal regions of Malabar even prior to the beginnings of Islam and its prophet.

As early as the first century A.D., the anonymous author of the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* describes the town of Muziris as the principal international port of Malabar. According to Rolland Miller, who studied about the port cities of Kerala, the port of Muziris was one of the great commercial emporia of the world, challenged in India only by Kollam.<sup>45</sup> Islam spread all over the region. In those days, they did not face any kind of opposition or oppression from the non-Muslim rulers who were then in power.<sup>46</sup>

It is certainly true that the Arab conquests and rapid demographic diffusion and the political integration of Egypt, Syria, Iran, and North Africa created an enormously powerful zone of economic consumption.<sup>47</sup> The commodities involved in maritime trade in the Indian Ocean may be divided into various broad

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<sup>45</sup> Rolland E. Miller, *Op.cit.*, p.39.

<sup>46</sup> S.M.H. Nainar, (trans.), *Tuhfat al- Mujahidin*, Calicut, 2006, p.4.

<sup>47</sup> K.N. Chaudhury, *Op.cit.*, p.35.

categories such as aromatics, medicines, dyes and spices; foodstuffs, wood and textiles; gems and ornaments; metals; and plant and animal products.<sup>48</sup>

Kollam appears in the international trade map only by the ninth century, when it was being frequented as the chief halting centre by the merchants engaged in the long distance trade between Abbasid Persia and T'ang China.<sup>49</sup> Till the establishment of the Roman Empire, the carrying trade was in the hands of Arab merchants. These merchants supplied the Egyptians with precious stones, muslin, spices and frankincense which they used in worship and mummification.

The rise of Islam in the seventh century A.D., gave a great fillip to Arab trade with different countries. They in the course of the seventh and eighth centuries made several descents upon the coasts of Gujarat, the Gulf of Cambay and Malabar.<sup>50</sup> The consolidation of political authority and establishment of peace and order during the Abbasid period (750-1258) stimulated travel and trade. Under the patronage of Abbasid Caliphate, art, industry and trade flourished in Islamic cities.<sup>51</sup> Baghdad was visited by traders from remote countries, information could be exchanged easily due to the popularity of paper, the spread of writing

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<sup>48</sup> Himanshu Prabha Ray, *A Historical Survey of Seafaring and Maritime Networks of Peninsular India*, New Delhi, 2006, p.7.

<sup>49</sup> Pius Malekandathil, "Christians and the Cultural Shaping of India in the First Millennium A.D." in *Journal of St. Thomas Christians*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2006, p.12.

<sup>50</sup> R.H. Major, *India in the Fifteenth Century*, Reprint, Delhi, 1992, p.xvi.

<sup>51</sup> Xinru Liu, *Silk and Religion (An Exploration of Material Life and Thought of People, A.D. 600-1200)*, New Delhi, 1996, p.138.

and the use of a common language and hence Islamic geographers' knowledge of the various customs and products of different lands was very good.

Spices from Kerala were in great demand in different parts of the world. The Malabar ports supplied a variety of commodities including pepper, ginger, Brazil wood and cardamom. Among these items pepper formed the greatest single commodity exported. The aromatic goods of India, teak wood, peacock, fine textiles and other oriental curiosities found their way to the distant parts of Europe much prior to the rise of Islam through west Asian regions especially Red Sea and Persian Gulf. After a setback for a couple of centuries in this relation on account of political instability, the flow of commodities was revived in the wake of the domination of Islam over some parts of Africa and West Asia.<sup>52</sup>

The port of Kollam is frequently mentioned in the Arab works as an important port where the Arab merchants used to halt on their way to Southeast Asia. The inscriptional record of the merchant group in Pahlavi<sup>53</sup> by name is of great value. The fact that signatures in Pahlavi (see p.241, F10 & 242 F.11) are appended to the Kollam grant of Sthanu Ravi corroborate the commercial relations of Kollam with Persia. Elsewhere evidence of commerce between West Asia and the west coast of India in the ninth century is of a more general nature. Evidences mention of trading stations and commodities of trade contained in Arab sailing guides and topographies.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> K.S. Mathew, *Indo Portuguese Trade and the Fuggers of Germany*, New Delhi, 1997, p.41.

<sup>53</sup> Pahlavi shows the relation of Kollam with Persia.

<sup>54</sup> Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, New Delhi, 1988, p.22.

The ports of the Persian Gulf had maintained predominance in the commerce of the Arabian Sea. Vessels had usually sailed from Bassora and Hormuz to Kollam and Colombo.<sup>55</sup> Long- range of arteries of maritime trade had spanned the Asian continent as Chinese *junks* and Arab *dhow*s<sup>56</sup> obdurately sailed to and from between southern China and the Persian shores.

Kollam was the chief destination for the Christian immigrants from Persia in the beginning of the ninth century A.D., where they mobilized maritime trading activities around the Tharisappally. This church turned out to be the principal mobilizing force behind the long-distance maritime trade conducted between Kerala and West Asia<sup>57</sup>.

It was a time when the traders from Abbasid Persia were expanding their commercial networks in Indian Ocean. It started with the shifting of Umayyad Khalifs to Baghdad by the Abbasids (750-870) in 762 A.D., with a view to have access into the Indian Ocean via Tigris and to control its trade. This long distance sea trade flourished due to the existence of large empires at both ends of the route: the Abbasid Caliphate (750-870) in Persia which had changed the capital from Damascus to the commercially strategic Baghdad and the T'ang dynasty (618-907) in China which provided unbroken peace in the south for two and a half centuries.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800*, Cambridge, 1967, p.5.

<sup>56</sup> *Junks* and *dhow*s are different types of Chinese ships.

<sup>57</sup> Pius Malekandathil, "Christians and Cultural Shaping of India", *Op.cit*, p.8.

<sup>58</sup> Pius Malekandathil, *The Germans, The Portuguese and India*, Munster, 1999, p.4.

The merchants of this route used to spend an average of two weeks trading at Kollam, as they waited for a favorable monsoon for their journey across the Bay of Bengal to China. This commercial route contributed to the growth of Kollam, which in turn, intensified the trade moving to Levant and Venice through the Persian Gulf-Baghdad-Aleppo routes.

The foundation of Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Empire, greatly encouraged Indo-Arab trade, since the capital of the Arab empire was directly connected with Indian ports and markets by water<sup>59</sup>. When Basra rose into prominence, it became the terminus of Arab trade, where the imports and exports were collected and distributed. According to Al-Masudi (956 A.D) large numbers of Arab merchants had settled down in many of the coastal towns of India for purposes of trade.

Merchant Sulayman (9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) had described the sea-borne trade with India. The commodities of commerce were first brought from Basra and Uman to Siraf and then were loaded on ships. A supply of drinking water was taken aboard. The ships sailed and were anchored at the port of Muscat, later bound for India. It took them a full month to reach Kollam Mali and from here the ships sail bound for China.

From ninth century onwards, with rapid Islamic expansion, the Arab *dhow*s and Abbassid merchants also began to visit Kerala coast rather regularly for trade. Consequently an Islamic commercial superstructure was erected upon

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<sup>59</sup> A.P. Ibrahim Kunju, *Studies in Medieval Kerala History*, Trivandrum, 1975, p.7.

the substratum laid by the trade networks and mercantile settlements of the Sassanid traders over centuries.

However with the entry of the Abbassid merchants, the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean got re-oriented. The *dhow*s that started from Persian Gulf took 30 days to reach Koulam Mali and another 30 days to reach Qalah (Kedah in Malaya Peninsula) and another 30 days to reach Canton.<sup>60</sup> Thus the one-way trip from Persian Gulf to China took 90 days. On the way, these *dhow*s invariably took shelter in Kollam for want of favourable monsoon wind and for taking provisions. Against the background of repeated commercial voyages of the Abbassid merchants, Muslim trading community started appearing in Kollam.

Rigid caste barriers and 'brahmanization' of the social order as occurred in the early medieval period adversely affected the still relatively open maritime orientation of Malabar in the earlier centuries, when Buddhism and Jainism held strong positions. It was in the period of the Kulasekhara of Mahodayapuram, in the eighth to twelfth centuries, that the natives of Malabar became almost exclusively agrarian- oriented and Brahmins rose to dominance that fostered an increasingly obsessive thalassophobia among the caste Hindus, while permitting the Jews and Muslims to seize the overseas trade.<sup>61</sup> This was not a coincidence

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<sup>60</sup> Pius Malekandathil, "Winds of Changes and Links of Continuity: A Study on the Merchant Groups of Kerala and the Channels of their Trade, 1000-1800, Paper presented in the 19<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Modern South-Asian Studies, Leiden University, Netherlands, 26<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> June 2006, p.3.

<sup>61</sup> Andre Wink, *Op.cit.*, p.72.

that the implantation of Muslim communities becomes better visible, and the more caste prohibitions against trans-oceanic travel and trade seem to obtain a hold on the Hindu population and turns it to agrarian pursuits and production, away from trade and maritime transport.

Ibn Battuta writes that ‘the Muslims are the people who are most respected in this country (Malabar), but the natives do not eat with them and don’t allow them to enter their houses’ on the one hand the Mappilas and their predecessors were indispensable in the trade with the Muslim Middle East. But on the other hand, the ritualized barrier of caste segregated the Muslims from the social life of the Hindus<sup>62</sup> and ‘avoidance’ was routinely practiced on the open roads. It was natural for the Arabs to make the Kerala coast their first and chief port of call. Not only was it the nearest halting place, but it was also the source of pepper, the black gold, as well as other valuable products. Castanheda writes about the residences of Muslim merchants at Calicut. They had trade relations with Kollam, Mombaza and Mozambique.<sup>63</sup>

The half millennium from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries saw a remarkable increase in the world trade in which the five regions of Europe, West Asia, India, South East Asia and China were knit together in a complementary exchange of goods, services, people and culture. Trade was transformed in nature from a low-volume, high-value trade to a bulk trade in a variety of commodities of

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p.74.

<sup>63</sup> K.S.Mathew, “The Portuguese Historians of the Sixteenth Century and the Study of Kerala History” in *Journal of South Indian History*, Vol.2, Issue 1, March 2005, Calicut, pp.74 -75.

daily consumption. The volume of shipping increased enormously, egged on by advances in maritime technology, especially on the two extremes of Europe- West Asia and China.<sup>64</sup>

The process of Islamic penetration served to bring India closer into the commercial networks of world trade, offering Islam both a land route and a sea route to the productive capacity of the sub-continent. It accelerated from the thirteenth century, and India became closely integrated into the world commercial economy.<sup>65</sup>

In the boat building technology of Kerala and Lakshadweep the tying system of planks by coir instead of joining by iron nails had continued even in the modern period. The contact of the Arabs with Kerala in fact had been responsible for the genesis of a potential religious community in Kerala.<sup>66</sup> Although the religion was different from the local religion its followers and the converts had even incorporated some of the cultural traditions including the matrilineal system of inheritance from the native soil. Their role in the process of establishing several coastal towns was also significant. The Arab relationship was entirely different from those of the colonial contacts and subjectification of all the later periods. Their contacts had been responsible for economic and cultural development of Kerala.

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<sup>64</sup> Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Maritime India in the Seventeenth Century*, New Delhi, 1994, p.34.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>66</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *Op.cit.*, p.21.

The classical theatres of Kerala, Koodiyattam and Kathakali have borrowed at least some items of costumes from the Arabs and the local Mappilas. The female costumes in Kathakali are actually the same dress as used by Mappila women.<sup>67</sup> The dress known as 'Kuppayam' was a forbidden thing for a high caste woman of Kerala who kept her upper part naked. Therefore, the model was taken from the Mappila womenfolk.

Like Syrian Christians, the Muslims were also generally accorded 'respectable' status by Hindus and their interests were primarily commercial and a spirit of friendly co-operation prevailed between Jew, Muslim, Hindu and Christian and between the free merchants and their bond servants who served as their agents.<sup>68</sup>

In the early centuries of Islamic history Jewish communities could be found in almost every city of the Caliphate, and Jews participated in trade ventures far beyond the frontiers of the Islamic state. With the establishment of the Fatimid anti-Caliphate in Cairo in the tenth century a Westward migration of Jews began and the distinction of 'Easterners' and 'Westerners' became blurred.<sup>69</sup>

There was a wide variety of merchant groups in Kerala, which were engaged in different types of exchange activities ranging from the highly organized long-distance commerce to simple peddling trade. They often operated jointly ensuring

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.90.

<sup>68</sup> Uma Das Gupta, (ed.), *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant 1500-1800*, New Delhi, 2001, p.112.

<sup>69</sup> Andre Wink, *Op.cit.*, p.87.

continuity in the very process of circuit of commodities. In this process the peddling traders served as grass-root level distributors or collection agents for the merchants involved in the long distance trade. However the survival strategies developed by the former varied very much from those of latter though they did not remain totally uninfluenced by one another.

When in Malabar upper caste aversion against the maritime vocation spread and effects came to be felt of massive Brahman immigration under royal sponsorship, it became mandatory to assign the role of the ‘merchants of the sea’ to foreign social groups which were settled locally but were beyond the pale of Hinduism. That role seems to have been taken over by the Anjuvannam and Manigramam guilds under the direction of Jews and Christians. Especially in the tenth and eleventh centuries the hostility against Buddhism and Jainism shows itself to have become marked and the role of the Jews appears to have become correspondingly more dominant.<sup>70</sup>

The Jewish traders who were linked with the ‘Anjuvannam’<sup>71</sup> merchant guild emerged as a leading merchant community of Kerala.<sup>72</sup> They had developed their own navigational lines to take pepper, ginger, brazil-wood and cardamom from the ports of Malabar from as early as 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards, as testified by the

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*,p.101.

<sup>71</sup> T.A. Gopinatha Rao, “A Note on Manigramattar Occuring in Tamil Inscriptions” in Rao Bahadur et.al ed., *Epigraphia India and Record of the Archaeological Survey of India, Vol.XVIII-1925-26*, p.70.

<sup>72</sup> Pius Malekandathil, “Winds of Change and Links of Continuity”, *Op.cit*, p.2.

Jewish letters of Cairo Genizza.<sup>73</sup> The Genizza<sup>74</sup> letters throw the most interesting light upon the commercial methods and activities of the Jews, who conducted business linking the networks of Diaspora.<sup>75</sup>

The earliest Jewish settlements in Kerala were in port cities like Kozhikode, Kodungallur and Kollam.<sup>76</sup> Another place where Jews had a settlement was the port of Flandarina also known as Fandarayana, the present Panthalayani Kollam.<sup>77</sup> It is evident from Tarisappalli Copper Plates (see p.239-40) that they had their guild of Anjuvannam at Kollam and that it was recognised by Ayyanatikal. The leader of Anjuvannam of Shingly, during the tenth century was Joseph Rabban. He was installed as its titular head by Bhaskara Ravi Varma, the Kulasekhara Perumal, conferring on him all the princely privileges and prerogatives enjoyed by the aristocracy of the land. Engraved on Copper Plates this Royal Deed is the most precious historical document related to the history of the Jews of Kerala. The original Copper Plate grants of King Bhaskara Ravi Varman are still in the safe custody of the White Jews of Cochin<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Genizza is the Hebrew name of a depository. It was a collection of documents left by the merchants of Tunisia and Morocco, who had settled in Egypt during the period of Fatimid rule.

<sup>75</sup> Elkan Nathan Adler, *Op.cit.*, p100.

<sup>76</sup> P.M.Jussay, *The Jews of Kerala*, Calicut, 2005, p.19.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

<sup>78</sup> *Report on the Administration of the Archaeological Department of the Cochin State for the Year 1102 ME (1926-27A.D.)*, Ernakulam, 1928, p.5.

The Jewish sources reveal the import of copper and allied metals and the export of iron from the ports of Malabar. All these transactions were not on the basis of immediate exchange. Accounts were kept and prices were fixed after taking into account freight charges and the like.<sup>79</sup> With the arrival of more Jewish traders from West Asia and the Mediterranean world from ninth century onwards, there eventually appeared seeds of differentiation within this mercantile community and the community has been divided into Black Jews (or the earliest Jewish settlers in Malabar) and White Jews (or the pardesi Jews) who reached Malabar following the Jewish and Arab commercial expansion of the ninth century.

Barbosa attested the presence of White Jews and Black Jews in Aden.<sup>80</sup> Aden is one of the most celebrated and ancient ports in the Indian Ocean. Its position in the Gulf, commanding the entrance to the Red Sea, gave the power holding it control over the whole trade of the East which passed to Europe by way of Egypt. There are the synagogues of the Black Jews and White Jews at Mattanchery in Cochin.<sup>81</sup>

Several attempts were made from the part of the Cera rulers and his feudatories to encourage trade of the foreign and local merchants operating at different places of Kerala, particularly after the defeat of Cera naval power at

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<sup>79</sup> M.Vijayalakshmi, *Op.cit.*, p.108.

<sup>80</sup> M.L. Dames(trans.), *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, Vol.I, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 53-55.

<sup>81</sup> *Report on the Administration of the Archaeological Department of the Cochin State for the Year 1102*, *Op.cit.*, p.5.

Vizhinjam and the loss of Kollam to the forces of Raja Raja Chola (985-1014). In the war council that was convened, Joseph Rabban the head of the Anjuvannam merchant guild linked with the Jews of Muyirikode (Cranganore) placed at the disposal of the Cera ruler his men and materials for the conduct of the war with the Colas. In return he was conferred with seventy-two privileges upon the leading traders. This is to be seen as a strategy to ensure the mercantile support of the Jewish merchants operating from different parts of Kerala for realizing his grand political designs.<sup>82</sup> Cola coins have been discovered from Kollam (see p.245, F.14).

Against the background of political support, some of the Jewish traders operating from Fatimid Egypt, but in collaboration with the Jews of Kerala had by this time developed extensive commercial networks linking the west coast of India with the eastern Mediterranean. Thus we find Mahruz b.Jacob, who was a ship-owning Jewish merchant (*nakhoda*), conducting trade with the ports of Konkan, Malabar and Egypt. The ports Konkan in general and Goa in particular had hectic trade relations with Koulam Male or Quilon as is testified by the Jewish letters of Cairo Genizza.

Ibn Battuta records about the Jews, who had one of their own members as their governor.<sup>83</sup> The Jewish traders who expanded their commerce along with the Arabs, either from Abbasid Persia or Fatimid Egypt were the principal

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<sup>82</sup> Pius Malekandathil,, “Winds of Change and Links of Continuity”,*Op.cit.*, p.4.

<sup>83</sup> Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa-1325-1354*, Translated and selected by H.A.R.Gibb, Reprint, New Delhi, 2001, p.238.

commercial intermediaries involved in the trade of Kollam. These Jewish traders bolstered their economic positions by well established family bonds and matrimonial links.<sup>84</sup>

Mahruz b. Jacob, in his letter of C.1145 A.D refers to Kanbayat (Cambay), Broach, Tana, Mangalore, Malibarath (Kulam Mali), Kayakanur (Lower Kannur) as the important centres of Jewish trade on the western seaboard.<sup>85</sup> More or less during the same period (A.D. 1116-17) we find one Allam b.Hassun, another Jewish merchant, making commercial voyage from Aden to Sindapur (Chandrapura) to sell storax and coral which he collect from Mediterranean ports.<sup>86</sup> After having carried out trading transactions in the port of Sindapur, he proceeded to Muniyabar (Malabar), whose important ports were Fakanaur (Barakuru or Bhatkal ) and Kawalam (Koulam Mali ) of which the latter was the most important port also for the Abbasid traders. Through the medium of Jewish traders the wheels of Kollam's commerce moved to the ports of Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Levant, from where commodities were further taken to Venice.

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<sup>84</sup> Pius Malekandathil, "The Impact of Indian Ocean trade on the Economy and Politics of Early Medieval Goa (c.8-15 c.)" in *Deccan Studies, Vol.II*, No. 1,2004, p.9.

<sup>85</sup> S.D. Goitein, "Portrait of a Medieval India Trader: Three Letters from Cairo Geniza", in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XLVIII, 1987, pp.457-60.

<sup>86</sup> Pius Malekandathil, "The Impact of Indian Ocean trade on the Economy and Politics of Early Medieval Goa (c.8-15 c.)" *Op.cit.*, p.9.

Marco Polo testifies that the people of Kollam were idolaters, but there are some Christians and some Jews.<sup>87</sup> He stated that a great deal of brazil was got here which was called 'brazil coilumin', from the country. Friar Odoric mentioned that they burned brazil-wood for fuel.<sup>88</sup> They had also abundance of very fine indigo. Benjamin of Tudela gives an account of the nature of trade at Kollam and its inhabitants. He recorded the presence of Jews in the city of Kollam and shares the view that they were good men and observers of law.<sup>89</sup>

The letters of Jewish traders permit a usually close look at the commerce between South India, the Red Sea ports and Egypt in the eleventh century and first half of the twelfth century. In this period iron and steel, classified as the most important item of exchange, Indian cotton textiles and silk, pearls, beads, cowries, ambergris, brass and bronze vessels, Chinese porcelain, African ivory, coconuts, timber, spices, dyes, medicines, aromatics, and leather goods were included in the commodities imported by Jewish merchants from India.

Since ancient time Kerala has been a centre of cultural transactions. Different religious groups were attracted to the land and the natives of Kerala received them without any hesitation. Thus different communities came and settled here and became part and parcel of Kerala society. The people who followed different religious and cultural patterns, with their conscious or

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<sup>87</sup> Henry Yule & Henri Cordier, (trans. & ed.), *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, Vol.II & Suppliment*, New Delhi, Revised Edn., 1998, p.375.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p.380.

<sup>89</sup> Manuel Komroff, (ed.), *Contemporaries of Marco Polo*, New York, 1937, p.310.

unconscious social behaviour had promoted a synthesis of cultures providing for a common heritage.

People living within a district or geographical contour, but following heterogeneous cultural and religious trends, are bound to promote a common culture or heritage pertaining to that particular society. More often, it can be a composite culture, but absolutely leading to a social integrity and unity. Thus medieval Kerala society witnessed a cultural conglomerance and known for its unity in diversity. It was the port cities of Kerala that acted as the arteries for carrying the cultural heritage along with the trading mechanisms. Of course, Kollam also served as a centre for cultural exchange through such a well flourished transmarine trade and commerce between Kerala and different foreign countries. The revival of the Kollam port gives some hope to think in terms of whether the golden era of the port could be revived.