CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In the initial chapter of the present research a question was raised as to how far the first interaction with a European society and culture on a permanent basis affected Malabar through acculturation. In the subsequent chapters an attempt was made to show how the interaction of the Portuguese affected different religious communities and predominant jatis of Malabar through their responses. Acculturation played a very significant role in the transformation of Malabar society. The native response to the Portuguese interaction varied depending on the attitude of the Portuguese and the response of the native religious communities, varnas and jatis.

Lusitanian society and culture were quite different from those of Malabar. Independent Portugal was formed by waging war against the Muslims and slowly conquering various strips of land from them. The society thus formed was divided economically into three sections, namely the primary sector of production, which concentrated itself on agriculture, animal husbandry and fishing, secondary sector of production that laid emphasis on textile, leather and metal industries and tertiary sector, which concentrated itself on internal and external trade. Again the society was divided into three estates, viz., the clergy, nobles and the commoners. The former two were known as the privileged estates and the latter unprivileged estate. Some of the basic traits of the Lusitanian culture were their ardent catholic faith, enmity to the Muslims on account of their unique history of unification, and the maritime dream as a national endeavour. The aim of the Portuguese maritime endeavour was to gain monopoly over the spice trade between the East and the West, which was in the hands of the Muslims since the fall of Constantinople to the Turks, who were their perpetual enemies. Missionary work was just a secondary motive. Later on they found that missionary activities would be very helpful for getting the support of the Catholic Church for realising their commercial dreams. They secured from the Pope several Bulls by which they avoided the possibility of any potential threat from the other West European countries. The right over the Eastern Seas was given to the Portuguese by the Pope. They believed that Pope, being the Vicar of Christ had, the authority to entrust seas and
lands to whomever he wished. Due to this belief the Portuguese perpetuated the idea of *Mare Clausum*.

The Malabar society and culture of the fifteenth century constituted a unique one. The Malabar society seen by the Portuguese was a society divided on the basis of religion, *varna* and *jati*. It was divided into different sub-cultures on the basis of religion. The predominant religions of this period in Malabar were Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Jewish religion. There were different *varnas* and *jatis* in Malabar such as the Brahmans, Nairs, *Tiya*, *Vettuvan*, *Mukkuvan*, *Pulaya*, *Paraya* and the *Tamil Chetties* and *Gujarati* Merchants who were outsiders. Each of these groups was a culture pattern. The socio-cultural relationship of each religious community, *varna* and *jati* was determined by the traditions that existed in the society. There was no room for a change in the age-old traditions. In the Hindu society of Malabar there was a hierarchy of *varnas* and *jatis*, which was set up on the basis of the response of each *jati* to the missionary work of the Hindu Brahmans. The occupation of each *varna* and *jati* was determined by birth and there was no possibility of an upward movement in the hierarchy of *varnas* and *jatis*. There were clear precepts and traditions regarding the internal life as well as the intermingling of each *varna* and *jati*. Among the Christians there were St. Thomas Christians and Quilon Christians, among the Muslims there were indigenous Muslims known as *Mapillas* and the foreign Muslims and among the Jews also there were Black and White Jews. The Christians were generally agriculturists and traders who dealt with pepper and other spices. The Muslims and the Jews were also traders who engaged in short distance as well as foreign trade. Politically Malabar was divided into several petty kingdoms including Cannanore, Calicut, Cochin, Quilon, Travancore and other principalities. All had accepted the overlordship of the Zamorin whose power was on account of his origin connected with *Cheraman Perumal* legend and the enormous wealth brought by the Muslim and other merchants from various parts of the globe. Malabar society as a cultural unit had a life pattern of its own.

In the initial period of interaction, that is, from 1498 to 1567, the Portuguese emphasis was on safeguarding their monopoly of trade in Malabar. When it was found

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that they would not be capable of realising their commercial dreams with the help of the Zamorin, they moved to Cochin where the king gave them asylum and staunch support. Basing on Cochin they began to realise their commercial interests. As part of it, they waged wars with the Zamorin and brought the rulers of Cannanore and Quilon to their side. Through a system of fortresses, fleet and cariizes, they gained mastery over the Indian Ocean Trade. Within a short span of time the commercial supremacy in Malabar passed into the hands of the Portuguese from the Muslims. In this process, the Portuguese developed both friendly and hostile relationships with different culture patterns depending on their needs. Whenever a culture pattern went against the Portuguese commercial designs, there occurred clashes. For example, the Portuguese maintained rather good relationships with the Hindus of Malabar whereas the relationship with the Muslims was rather disappointing. It was because of the fact that the Hindus, as they belonged to the non-commercial class, were not at all a threat for the Portuguese. The Portuguese succeeded in converting at least a few Brahmins and Nairs. Some of the Brahmins, due to their contacts with the Portuguese even ventured to travel to Lisbon crossing the seas, which was a religious taboo for the Brahmins. The Portuguese availed themselves of the service of many of the Hindus especially the Nairs in their fortresses and other establishments. Regarding the relationship with the Muslims, the Portuguese had two standards. They maintained a rather good relationship with the indigenous Mapilla Muslims, as they were not competitors in long distance spice trade. But whenever their commercial interests clashed the Portuguese did not hesitate to change their attitude from friendship to hostility. But they remained hostile to the foreign Muslims who engaged in maritime long distance trade. Religious antipathy towards the Muslims was only secondary. For, we see that the Portuguese had rather good relationship some of the Muslims. The enmity between the Muslims and the Portuguese started only when their trade interests clashed. Though the Portuguese attributed heresy to the St. Thomas Christians, they had good relationships with the St. Thomas Christians because they were the cultivators and traders of pepper, the much-wanted commodity of the Portuguese. The Portuguese made use of the religious affinity they had, to handle the St. Thomas Christians. Their relations with the Jews was also not so friendly as they were stiff competitors to the Portuguese in long distance trade. Besides, the inquisition against the new Christians in Portugal also worsened the relationship between the Portuguese and the Jews. During this period two new sections emerged in Malabar. They were the mixed races as a result of the mixed marriages and
the new converts. The mixed races had a life style different from the life style of the indigenous people as well as the Portuguese. The new converts from the Hindu and Muslim fold also created a different section in the society who followed the Portuguese in some of the social customs and religious precepts and worship. The conversion to Christianity brought about a lot of changes in their way of life. The converts from the lower castes enjoyed a lot of freedom after their conversion. For, they were no more subject to the law of the land after conversion but they were under the jurisdiction of the king of Portugal. This made them free and changed their way of life. The varna and jati restrictions were relaxed after the conversion. As we have already seen, the number of converts from the lower jatis was higher than that of the higher castes and jatis. They became staunch supporters of the Portuguese. Many of them imitated the western way of life and liturgy. The arrival of the Jesuits on the Malabar coast was an added impetus to the missionary activity which was at a dormant stage. Exploiting the social situation prevalent on the coastal areas, many people were baptised by the missionaries. The fortress at different coastal areas worked as centres of Portuguese activity in Malabar. There were a lot of changes in the society and culture in the field of social welfare with the establishment of schools, hospitals, and houses of charity. New Churches, houses of the religious orders, diocese, towns like Cochin, fortresses, forms of art and architecture, music and theatre, coinage, food habits, moral standards, language styles and dress codes developed in Malabar due to the Portuguese contacts. There were changes in the occupations of some of the jatis. For example the Pulayas who were agricultural labourers began to fight in wars. This was a drastic change in the jati set-up of Malabar. Besides the power balance among the Malabar kings was also disrupted. The port of Cochin was developed at the coast of Calicut and the position of the king of Cochin was stabilised at the coast of the Zamorin. Though this period was that of Portuguese commercial supremacy in Malabar, some of the basic traits of Portuguese culture, as we have stated earlier, were implanted.

The period beginning from 1567 to 1663 was predominantly a period of religious upheavals in Malabar. Though trade flourished, illegal trade and corsair activity coupled with the coming of the other European competitors and the presence of Spanish crown in Portugal crippled the trading activity of the Portuguese in Malabar. Several royal orders were sent by the crown prohibiting illegal trade by people of all standards. The relationship with the Hindus remained almost the same without
interfering much in their activities by the Portuguese. But there were changes in the occupations of some of them. Now the Hindu and Christian merchants were favoured and encouraged instead of Muslim merchants. Some of the Nairs who were originally warriors turned to trade. The relationship with the Muslims and Jews remained unaffected. Those Muslims, who engaged in illegal trade and piracy as a substitute for trade, were done away with by the Portuguese. Many Muslims had to resort to arms instead of trade. As the fate of the converts from lower jatis improved, many of them came for conversions, which affected the land so much, that the kings had to forbid conversions by threatening the converts with the confiscation of their property. Many Tiyas, Mukkuvas, Paravas, and a few Nairs received baptism as a result of the missionary activity of the Portuguese missionaries. The Portuguese gave the new converts so many benefits and privileges and their cause was looked after well. Drawback of the Portuguese presence during this period was that they alienated the St. Thomas Christians from their fold by accusing them of heresy. It was a period of bitter competition between various European religious congregations, the provincial councils and synods which were held to implement the canons of the council of Trent, which was convened as a counter reformatory movement. Though reformation did not have any bearing for Malabar, the counter reformatory canons were imposed up on Malabar through various Provincial councils. As it did not produce desired effect in Malabar, the Synod of Diamper was convened to bring about the socio-cultural and religious changes in Malabar, especially among the St. Thomas Christians. Another important motive behind the Synods and councils was to lessen the difference between the Christians of India and Portugal. The synod succeeded to a great extent in alienating the St. Thomas Christians from the socio-cultural and religious life that they had been living for centuries. The communications with the Middle East from where their spiritual leaders came and the other non-Christian sects were controlled. Socio-cultural mingling with their non-Christian counterparts was forbidden. Their system of nazrani ecclesial administration was substituted with Padroado system in Malabar and they were brought under the Pope. Enraged at this, the St. Thomas Christians did not co-operate with the Portuguese missionaries and the Portuguese administration. This affected even the very commercial existence of the empire because the St. Thomas Christians, after the synod of Diamper did not co-operate with the Portuguese in trade and other activities, as they used to do earlier. As the traditions of the St. Thomas Christians were not respected during subsequent years, they continued their non-
cooperation with the Portuguese. Enraged at the activities of the Portuguese missionaries during Bishop Francis Garcia, a section of the St. Thomas Christians protested against the Jesuits and Bishop Francis Garcia leading to a split in the St. Thomas Christians who were hitherto united as a single community. *Coonankurisusatyam* was a protest of the St. Thomas Christians to the activities of the Portuguese missionaries especially the Jesuits among them. The Jesuits had prevented the arrival of their prelates from the Middle East, the age-old traditions of the St. Thomas Christians were forbidden under the banner of heresy and their Archdeacon's privileged position was ignored. Through *Coonankurisusatyam*, one faction of the St. Thomas Christians sided with the Portuguese accepting catholic faith and the other faction under the leadership of the Archdeacon broke off from the Portuguese. Thus after almost half a century of Padroado activities among the St. Thomas Christians, they were sharply divided. Many cultural traits of the Portuguese continued to play their role in Malabar.

At the end of the Portuguese activities in Malabar, only the new converts, and a faction of the St. Thomas Christians stood with the Portuguese. The latter stood with the Portuguese because of the religious affinity and the respect they had for the Pope. The new converts, though from different *varnas* or *jatis* were moulded into one community by the Portuguese under the banner of Roman Catholicism. All other sections like the Hindus except those who were in the service of the Portuguese, the Muslims, the Jews and the rebelled faction of the St. Thomas Christians remained to be the strong opponents of the Portuguese. In this process, the relationship between the different culture patterns of the society also changed. The Muslims and the Jews became enemies of the Christians; the St. Thomas Christian factions themselves had conflicting views. The way of life of each of the culture pattern changed according to the needs of the time.

The Portuguese had more contacts with only those sections of the society, which had either some kind of religious or economic relationships. The relationships they developed were either friendly or hostile depending on the situation and the correspondence of interests. When their interests clashed, there were violent conflicts and where their interests corresponded they had friendly relations.
Thus acculturation that started in Malabar as result of the contacts with the Portuguese brought about a lot of changes in the frame of the society and in the culture, which is the expression of the society. In this acculturation process the influence of the kings, the religious affinity and trade relations worked as means of socio-cultural change. The impact of change was more felt on the coastal societies on account of the intense interaction of the Portuguese on the coastal areas. In the hinterland it affected only the St. Thomas Christians who being the producers of pepper and members of a common religion had more contacts with the Portuguese. Those Hindus and Muslims who were converted to Christianity and were employed by the Portuguese were mainly from the coastal societies.

It was the ethnocentrism, the feeling that one’s culture is superior to the other, of the Portuguese that played a great role in Malabar. They tried to minimise the difference between Malabar culture and Portuguese culture thinking that their way of life was superior to that of India. The same ethnocentrism of the Malabar societies paved way for confrontations with the Portuguese at various levels. As a result of the confrontation between two cultures, there occurred fission and fusion in the society that underwent acculturation. In this process of acculturation the new converts and a faction of the St. Thomas Christians fused with the Portuguese whereas majority of the Hindus, Muslims, Jews and a faction of the St. Thomas Christians broke away from the Portuguese leading to a fission in the society.

The Portuguese idea of mare Clausum was broken with the emergence of Protestantism in Western Europe. It was not possible to have a threat on the part of the catholic countries of Europe to their maritime empire of the East on account of the Papal Bulls that the Portuguese obtained in reward of the meritorious service Portugal did for the Catholic Church through the geographical discoveries, the crusade against the Muslims and propagation of faith.

With the capture of Cochin by the Dutch who were Protestants, the Portuguese interaction in Malabar ended but the socio-cultural traits they left in Malabar continued affecting society and culture for centuries to come. Thus the socio-cultural changes in Malabar that happened as a result of Portuguese interaction show that socio-cultural changes happens in “host cultures” due to the power, influence and religious affinity of the “guest cultures”.
SOURCE OF ILLUSTRATIONS


3. Coonan Cross in Mattancherry, ibid.

4. Map of Malabar in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. It is drawn by Mr. V. D. Baby on the basis of the details given by the researcher.


5. The façade of the Old St. Thomas Cathedral at Palai built in Portuguese style. (Photo taken by the researcher.)