INTRODUCTION

This study entitled “Coins and Currency of Pre-modern Kerala till 1600 A.D” is an attempt to trace out the history of coin circulation and its importance in Kerala history. The study of coins is associated with the term ‘Numismatics’ which is a multi-disciplinary science in the sense it requires knowledge in paleography, archaeology, epigraphy and history. It is one of the main sources for the reconstruction of history. As the study of coins constitutes one of the most reliable sources of revealing and projecting the history of the world, it now forms an important component of ancient history. The coins provide an unparalleled series of historical documents and they conjure up before us the life and story of those who had issued them.

The scope of Numismatics is very wide and covers the materials of which coins are made, as well as the sources of such materials. Coins are connected with the political, administrative, social, economic, religious and cultural life of the day. They also confirm and exemplify history known from other sources. Moreover they throw light on other branches of history for which no evidence is available from other sources. Of all antiquities that seem to be imperishable, coins are the most prominent, since they bring to our own age the life, culture and customs of the forgotten generations.

It is an important question as to how coinage and money originated and it is worthwhile suggesting an answer to this question. As far as we are aware, the evolution of coinage was made independently by Lydia, Greece, Rome, China and India. But Herodotus definitely singles out the Lydians in Asia Minor as the inventors of coins. However, it is widely accepted that they had an independent origin in India around sixth or fifth century BC. In fact, the available evidence of ancient coinage of India is scanty, dubious and capable of different interpretations. Therefore, the question arises whether the coinage began in India on its own or under external influence, and either way it happened at what time. It is generally believed that coinage independently
originated in India about sixth or fifth century of B.C with the punch-marked series and continued to be issued in an unbroken chronological sequence. Issued in gold, silver, copper, lead and other base metals and alloys, they are the best indicators of the periods of economic prosperity, socio-political strength and stability. However various views--both indigenous and foreign--have been expressed about the exact period and origin of Indian coins.

The introduction of coins is a landmark in the history of civilization and is a great achievement of the human race. The development of trade and commerce is impossible without money while the happiness and prosperity of human society depend largely on the case with which one’s necessities can be procured. The introduction of coins in the economic life of man solved such problems to a great extent. At the infancy of human civilization, people had to produce or procure their necessities by dint of their own labour. With the increase in population in localities, the exchange of different products became necessary and finally it led to the emergence of different forms of exchange, primarily barter, i.e., the exchange of ‘goods for goods’ system and subsequently, trade. Pre-trade system had several difficulties to overcome and one was the absence of a stable medium of exchange. Initially, articles like cowrie-shells were used to serve the purpose of money.

A large number of coins issued by various rulers in different areas were popular in India during the ancient period. Among the earlier issues, the punch-marked coins were most popular in India and they had wider circulation in the north than in the southern parts. Apart from the north, the south Indian kingdoms had developed their own coins and they carry the emblems or symbols of the issuing authorities. Besides these the circulation of punch-marked coins and certain coins from the foreign countries like Rome, Phoenecia, Ceylon, Venice, China, Arabia, Portugal etc were also reported from the regions of peninsular India.
Kerala was no exception to this, which has been proved by the discovery of these types of coins in different parts of this narrow strip of land. Various coins of indigenous origin were also reported from Kerala. However, it is understood that the numismatic history of Kerala has not been well-studied, because of the scant nature of inscriptional materials. But it may be noted that the available medieval epigraphic and literary sources provide much information regarding the monetary issues of the period and proper use of those materials should become a great asset to the numismatic history of Kerala. It is also a believable fact that the various types of coins like *kasu, achu, panam, ponnu, taram, tiramam* etc were circulated in Kerala. But there was no standardization of weights and measures and so it is possible that the value of coins varied from place to place. This prevents us from making any quantitative assessment.

Lack of serious archaeological excavations is one of the important causes for the limited availability of coins in Kerala. And all the available coins are yet to be catalogued and there is no energetic local department that could throw light on or identify the whole Kerala coinage. However it is clear from the available information that many types of both indigenous and foreign coins were in circulation in ancient times.

**Methodology**

The study is expanded by making use of various sources which include numismatic reports of the Archaeological department of Kerala, inscriptional records, archival materials and personal interviews with persons who have contributed substantially to the study of Kerala coinage. The available coins also provide fresh knowledge for the study. However a major share of information came from official publications of the Numismatic Society of India, South Indian Numismatic Society and Kerala Numismatic Society. Reports in leading English and Malayalam newspapers also provided dependable source material.
The editorial works of the Indian Institute of Research in Numismatic Studies, Gazetteers Department of Kerala and Department of the Cultural Publication of Government of Kerala were also used. The classical literature of the Sangam period, the medieval manipravalam literatures and the account of foreign travelers give details about the trade, markets and exchange system which existed in Kerala during the past centuries. These studies made by foreign numismatists regarding the circulations of Roman, Punch-marked and indigenous coins in Kerala are very useful materials for the reconstruction of the history of Kerala coinage.

Besides these the large number of books and journals available in the research departments and universities in Kerala, Chief Epigraphist Library, Mysore, Centre for Development Studies Thiruvananthapuram; South Indian Numismatic Society, Annasalai, Chennai, Manuscript Library University of Kerala, Karyavattom, Thiruvananthapuram, Numismatic Museum, Koyikal Palace, Nedumangadu, Centre for Heritage Studies, Hill Palace Thripunithura etc. were also used for this study. The proper use of these sources has helped to unfold the history of coinage system in Kerala till 1600 AD.

Scheme of Study

The present study consists of five chapters. The following are the contents.

Introduction

I Sources and Historiography (Numismatic Studies: A detailed review)

II Early coinage: Punch-marked coins and Roman coins

III Dynasties and coins in medieval Kerala.

IV Medieval trade, markets and modes of exchange.

V Conclusion
The introductory Part seeks to identify the importance of investigation, objectives and problems of the study. It further discuss methodology and scheme of the study.

The first chapter deals with a brief description of the origin, development and significance of coinage in general and Kerala coinage in particular and is followed by a review of the relevant literature.

The source materials constitute a variety of texts consisting of medieval inscriptions, accounts of foreign travellers, Manipravalam literature and folk narratives. A different type of evidence is in the form of archaeological relics including pottery and coins which in their own way narrate aspects of medieval trade, commerce and coinage.

The inscriptions are smaller in number when compared to other regions and they are scattered in widely separated areas. These epigraphical records include royal charters which are attributed roughly to the period from the 9th to the 15th century. There are some temple inscriptions too which refer to various aspects of trade and commerce either directly or indirectly. Some of them are on copper plates and some on stones. These inscriptions usually addressed to a contemporary society cannot be easily understood or interpreted at a later stage without the support of corroborative literary data. Various theories and concepts are necessary for interpreting these records. However earlier scholars have employed many concepts. One such apparatus is the feudal model. It has been shown how royal authorities received the trading chiefs, how they were provided for their maintenance and prosperity and also how they were endowed with privileges. Thus these records inform us about both the social and economic conditions of the trading chiefs. These inscriptions also reveal various functions of the trading centres, medium of exchange and also the nagaram formation and their organisational aspects.

Epigraphical records also provide a new insight into the study of coins. Earlier the interests of the scholars were on the physical features of coins such
as the weight-standard, emblem, legend etc. A coin from a soil layer is
disappointedly silent about its use in the society whereas the textual
references to them both in literary and non-literary texts touch upon all the
aspects of its circulation such as price of articles, level of monetization,
exchange rate and so on. In this study an effort is also made to integrate
numismatic evidence with epigraphical and literary texts so as to get a
comprehensive picture regarding the use of coins during this period.

The numismatic evidences for this study are supplemented by epigraphical
sources. There is a comparative dearth of coins in medieval Kerala,
especially of the first phase of our study. It has been opined that the
knowledge about the medieval coins of Kerala is deplorably poor and
nothing certain is known about the coins of Kerala, but for the coins of Vira
Kerala. We have to go back to the days of the Pandyas and Cholas in order to
trace the evolution, growth and development of the monetary system in south
India. The volume II, No:1 of the Tamil Antiquary with a discussion on
Dravidian coins by Dewan Bahadur.T.M. Rengachariar and Dewan Bahadur.T
Desikacharier gives a clear insight into the monetary system of south India.

A large number of books have been published regarding south Indian coins
of Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan. The work of K. Ganesh and Girijapathy is a
different one as it discusses the coins of the Chalukyas of Kalyana and
Kalachuris, coins of the Hangal Kadambas, coins of the feudatory chiefs, coins
with Kannada numerals, coins of Haider Ali and Tippu Sultan and several
coins of uncertain attribution.

Numismatics of Philip Grierson is a standard work on the subject for it
goes deep into the study of coins. The definition and scope of numismatics and
the origin of money and coinage are discussed elaborately in this book. It
makes us acquainted with the western and eastern traditions of coinage, types
and inscription accessory symbols, catalogue arrangements; Indian and Chinese
coinage, classification of coin finds and heads, recording and preservation,
datury and localization, methodology, counterfeits and forgeries, numismatics scholarship like coin collecting public collections, coin dealings, weights of typical coins etc. In short a reading of the book profoundly enlightens any person who is interested in the study of coins and monetary system.

The place of S.K. Maity as an author in numismatics stands close to P.L. Gupta. His *Early Indian Coins and Currency System* is a valuable contribution to numismatics and indological studies. The prevalence of coined money since the days of Kautilya in Magadha and the uniformity and all-India circulation of punch-marked coins are analysed in the work. It provides a vivid picture of political history, historical geography, economic theories, art and culture, currency and exchange, Indus economy, Vedic and post-Vedic agricultural life, barter system etc.

*A Study of Ancient Indian Numismatics* (Indigenous)-from the earliest times to the rise of the Imperial Guptas (Third Century A.D) by Surendra Kisor Chakraborty, deals with the discussion, criticism and systematic arrangement of our knowledge of the indigenous system of ancient Indian numismatics up to the 3rd Century A.D, with special reference to north India.

The method of exchange of the primitive men was virtually confined to barter, which most probably arose from the practice of mutual propitiation of gifts and gradually the idea that the present received should be of like-worth with that given was established, and exchanged articles in course of time lost the character of presents. This system is to be seen in India as late as the Dharma Sutras, the Pali Canons.

The book *Tribal Coins-A study*, by Mahesh Kumar Sharan is rich in facts about the early tribal coinage of India. The significant fact is that besides knowing the period of their rule and genealogy we get the complete history of the times from those coins. Alexander Cunningham’s work *Coins of Ancient India* deals with the earliest times down to the end of the sixth century A.D. This volume includes (1) the Rajahs of Kashmir, (2) The Shahis of Gandhara;

T.Sathyamurthy’s Catalogue of Roman Gold Coins is the second in the series of catalogues published by the Department of Archeology, Kerala, which covers all the gold coins in the collections of the Department of Archaeology, Kerala, covering a period of 250 years of Roman Emperors form Augustus to Marcus Aurilius. An interesting feature of the hoards is that coins up to the period of Hardian (A.D 117 to 138), are worn out recording their circulation, while the coins belonging to the Antominous Pius (A.D 138-161) onwards are relatively mint fresh, irrespective of the hoards. The subject matter on the reverse types itself is a fascinating study, covering majority of Roman Gods, Goddesses, Semi-Gods, personification and mythological scenes and portrayal of military trumpets of the Roman Emperors.

The Portuguese, Indian Ocean and European Bridge-Heads is a tribute to the great service rendered to historiography by K.S.Mathew. In this volume most of the articles are by renowned historians who are part of the new historiographical schools which try to explode the various myths regarding the European expansion in the East and reconstruct the European activities in India in an objective and scientific way where Indo-centric dimensions are given the focus. K.Ratnamma in her Anandapura varnam-padavum, padanagalum, gives a detailed description of Argodis, exchange of goods, list of coins during 1415 Travancore, coins like Aanayachu, Achu, Panam, Thiramam, and the presence of foreigners like Chonakar, Yavanas, and Papparakayyar (barbarians). It further mentions Sri Padmanabha Swami Temple and Kanthaloor Sala. The hues and cries on global trade and a review of trade between Europe and Kearla are presented in Kerala Economy and European Tradition by two eminent economic historians, K.S.Mathew and Pius Malekandathil. K.S.Mathew attempts to make a survey of European contacts with Malabar coast from the 4th century A.D and tries to assess their impact on
Kerala economy. He analyses the development of factory systems, growth of urban centers, rise of intermediary role of Indian merchants, change in cropping pattern, growth of diplomatic relation with Europe and development of the means of communication during this period. Pius Malekandathil analyses the influence of European trade on agriculture in pre-modern Kerala, since 1500 A.D. This period is also impressed in the incorporation of Malabar into European trade system and substantial growth in the spices production.

Distinguished are the contributions of M.G.S. Narayanan to the history of Kerala. He has carefully examined the inscriptions and other original sources of Kerala history and modified several theories of his predecessors. He has dealt with trade and trading centres of Kerala in the Kulasekhara period in detail in his doctoral thesis and this work provides valuable information about the nagaram and several merchant guilds of South India. In his Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala, he has brilliantly integrated inscriptive evidences with other sources. His Perumals of Kerala and Kerala Caritrattinte Atistana Silakal contains along with many valuable information, inscriptive evidences for the study of medieval trade, markets and economy of Kerala.

N.M. Namboothiri has made a unique attempt to trace the evolution of Kozhikode as an urban centre based on foreign accounts and toponymical evidences. This is the first attempt to introduce a new category of evidence for the study of urban centres and markets in medieval Kerala. He describes the city in detail in accordance to the traditional ideals of town planning in the light of toponymical remains.

K.N. Ganesh depicts the socio-economic conditions of Kerala in his work Keralattinte Innalekal. The commercial crops of Kerala, the spice trade, the various items of exports and imports from and to Kerala, production, distribution, redistribution of wealth, resources from ocean and forests and various arts and crafts etc, are discussed in this work. He refers to the import of cotton to Kerala, the weaver class, various weights and measures, various
kinds of coins and the modes of exchange. The work is a unique one as it provides various dimensions to the study of history.

M.R. Raghava Varier provides an orientated outlook to the economic and social history of Kerala. The studies on Pantalayani Kollam and Kozhikode of Raghava Varier are exceptional examples for the study of urbanisation and allied subjects in Kerala. He has integrated place names, inscriptions, coins, literary and archaeological data and has prepared a theoretical framework to analyse the problem of trade and urbanisation in Medieval Kerala. *Kerala Caritram* co-authored by Varier and Rajan Gurukkal initiates new perspectives in the study of history.

Rajan Gurukkal gives a new perspective to the study of Kerala history. By bringing to the frame of a new orientation, he has relieved writing of history from the bondages of conventional historiography. His work ‘Kerala Temple and Early Medieval Agrarian System can be treated as the first step towards this destination. In *Kerala Caritram* co-authored by Raghava Varier aspects of trade, medieval centred economy, coin use, markets, angadi-s, cantas and modes of exchange are occupying a very informative space. Several other works and articles published by him has heralded the dawn of a scientific innovation in and interpretation to history.

Kesavan Veluthat’s book on The History of Medieval South India is worthy of special mention in this regard. He analyses the *nagaram* of medieval South India with an innovative outlook and examines the views of Kenneth Hall, Champakalakshmi, and Meera Mary Abraham regarding the concept of *nagaram* and arrives at the conclusion that *nagaram* was a separately designated area inhabited by traders.

In Chapter II, Part I, the emergence and spread of punch-marked coins, its hoards in Kerala, coins of the Cheras of the classical period and its importance are presented. In Part II, the Indo-Roman trade contact is discussed. Along with this, the list of goods of exchange, the issue of Roman coins,
available Roman coin hoards in Kerala etc. are discussed with their common features. Punch-marked coins, which represent India’s earliest known numismatic issues, have played a vital role in ancient Indian economy for well over five centuries, from the sixth century B.C to the first century B.C. Punch-marked coins known generally in silver and rarely in copper are of various sizes and weights. They were in vogue when writing was not current in India and were rarely used. Symbols are the most conspicuous features of these coins and they do not bear any legend or inscription. Various forms of representations like hills, birds, trees, animals, human figures, floral and geometrical patterns etc, appear on them, the exact importance of which is still not clear and remains as mysterious as ever. The punching devices of these coins may be identified into several hundred varieties. Earlier symbols were simple and bold, but later ones tended to be comparatively small and complex in design.

The name punch-marked is derived from the fact that the coins concerned bear symbols stamped by different punches and these punch-marked symbols were generally associated with villages, towns, cities, mountains, river banks and mint masters. Each of the symbol is found confined to the coins of a particular area or on those of a particular variety or type. Thus they enable one to isolate the coins of one area from those of another, of one state from those of another and of one period from those of another.

Commercial contacts between India and Roman Empire are fairly well attested by several sources, but among them the most important one is the Roman coins, which were found in different parts of India. India is famous for the abundance of finds of aurie (gold coins) and denari (silver coins) issued by the Roman Emperors. The available Roman coins from different parts of India have announced the mutual contact of the Roman traders and the Indians which throws light on the social, political, economic and cultural conditions of that period. Roman trade with India started as early as the 1st century B.C. and grew to sizeable proportions by the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D. A commercial network
involving Rome, Egypt and Arabia, which were major participants in the trade with India and south East Asia evolved in the early centuries of the Christian era. A major part of India contributed to this trade activity. Roman gold and silver reached the north west, west and south India in return for luxury items.

Majority of the Roman coins were found in the form of hoards, which may be the result of some local fear or panic of some sudden attack or war or some other natural phenomenon which forced the people to bury their treasures of the large number of Roman coins found in India, majority of which were discovered in south India, particularly the Andhra region, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. Roman coins were rarely found in north India because most of these coins were melted and were restruck by the Kushan rulers. But there are some debates that the Kushana coins are known only in two metals- gold and copper. They used few silver pieces, which are not considered to be genuine. Probably they melted or restruck the Roman gold coins, i.e. auries. However, if they melted the silver coins of the Romans, i.e. denari, why was this metal rare in the Kushana coinage? The truth is that the Roman contact with North India was less than that of south India. The north Indian finds of Roman coins constitute a very different evidence compared to south Indian finds. The north Indian hoards are mixed votive deposits of Republican denari and 2nd century A.D. auri in Budhist stupas. They represent the remnants of transit trade across north India, rather than the new sea-borne trade of the south. Various south Indian hoards contain a large number of coins of the imperial issues, especially the coins issued during the reign of Augustus, Tiberius and Nero. Republican coins also have been reported from south India, but they are rarer than the imperial coins. Before going through the findings of Roman coins in India, a brief description of the history of the coinage of Rome is necessary.

The third chapter deals with different names of coins like kasu, palamkasu, alkasu, achu, aanaiachu, tiramam, taram, salaka, panam etc. and its variations and monetary issues of Venad, Kochi, Calicut and Kolathunadu.
The presence of *Kammattam* (mint) is also delineated. The Sangam period witnessed the emergence of a relatively activated and stimulated economy in south India. As a result of the newly forged connections with the foreigners, the regional economy of south India incorporated a larger system of exchange in which barter played a significant role, despite the money circulation in restricted areas. Large number of commodities were exported to and imported from south India to diverse foreign countries using a barter-cum-money-based exchange system. As a major commercial zone of south India, Kerala bagged huge profit through the foreign contact, especially with Rome. That is what we infer from the highly valued foreign coins, which mainly circulated in the Sangam period, in different parts of the narrow strip of the land of Kerala. After the Sangam period the trade contacts between India and Rome dwindled; however there was a slight revival of trade in luxurious items in the Sarsanid and Byzantine empires. Trade declined considerably during the reign of the Perumals of Mahodayapuram. Absence of a specific currency system of their own was a noticeable feature of the Perumal rule. According to M.G.S. Narayanan, “The inscriptions of the Chera rulers generally mention payments being made in terms of gold of specific weight and rarely mention other coins”.

There is no mention of any coin identifiable as those of the Chera’s. Though there was no centralized coinage system, there were large number of references and reliable evidences to the coins of this period which give a clear picture of the coinage system of different regional dynasties which flourished during the medieval period in Kerala. The inscriptions obtained from Kerala during this period give several names of coins, their denominations and sometimes mints. They supply stray information without giving details about the coinage of the times. The dynasties of Kerala seem to have issued coins of different names. Though actual coins of the various regional dynasties of Kerala are not found in large numbers, their mention in inscriptions indicate prosperity. Some medieval inscriptions of the other dynasties in south India also mention the names of certain coins which flourished in Kerala. The
available sources of the 9th and 10th centuries A.D. mainly give some knowledge about certain coins like dinara, kasu and palamkasu. Among these, the word *dinara*, is well-known to us as Roman coin in silver. The name *dinara* is known in medieval Kerala mainly through a single record, viz, the Valappally copper plate which was issued in the 12th regnal year of the earliest known Perumal Rajasekhara. The inscription describes in one place about one hundred *dinara* as fine and in another place only three *dinara* with a hundred and fifty *tunis* of paddy. Some scholars like Elamkulam Kunjanpillai consider that *dinara* came to Kerala with the Brahmins from North India. We have only limited knowledge about *dinara* as silver coins. But some references about the word *dinara* as gold coins is also available in the Gupta records. If the Valappally inscription speaks about the *dinara* as gold coins, we can probably believe the argument of Elamkulam. But it is a fact that the inscription speaks only about the numbers of the coins, not its metal content. H. Sarkar believed that it must have been an Arab currency. He also suggests that the word *dirammam*, a Tamil form of drachma appearing in some Tamil inscriptions should be considered a corruption of *dinara*. Chathopadhyaya has shown that the currency named *dinara* was in circulation even in the 4th century A.D at Nagarjunakonda, much earlier to the Arab currency. Abdul Majeed is of the view that the term *tinaram* mentioned in the Valappally copper plate is an Arab coin.

Medieval market system and modes of exchange are analysed in Chapter IV. It describes the activities in major trading centres of medieval Kerala, trading groups and guilds, administered trade, trade routes and spice trade in the early decades of the advent of the Europeans. It describes various goods for sale in medieval *angadi-s* as described in the medieval literature, like *sandesakavyas*, *champu-s*, *Anathapuravarananam* and *grandavaries*, the prevalence of the inter-commodity exchange rate, payments of fines and money grants, role of traders and temples and the absence of a standardised coin based system of exchange in medieval Kerala.
This chapter focuses on the trading activities of major trade centers, markets and their transactions, system of exchange, major trade routes and its developments, internal and external trade, overseas trade up to the end of the sixteenth century, urbanization of trading centers, trade guilds, organizational aspects of trade and administered trade etc. The advent of the Portuguese in 1498 opened the doors of a new era in the history and socio-economic and political life of India, especially of Kerala. Kerala witnessed a new experience of maritime trade quite different from that we experienced since the dawn of the first century A.D. Its resultant impact on society, economy and the cultural diasporas also form a part of the study. The long- prevailing notion that medieval Malabar was closed a economy is subjected to an analysis in this chapter. The Malabar economy which was confined to a agrarian and subsistence-oriented economy but positively responded to economic activities and daily markets consequent of the production of surplus, and began to play a predominant role in overseas trade and world economy due to the spice trade.

Agricultural growth in the hinterland, the availability of surplus, the amount of importance given to the commerce and overseas trade in the development of commodity production and exchange in the hinteland are certain necessary pre-conditions to urban growth. Due the availability of ample surplus in agricultural production active rural markets and trade centers developed in medieval Kerala. The process of urbanisation was gradually taking place in major trade centers and market places. Trade guilds and other organizational arrangements gave a conceptual basis for this urban process. Various levels of commercial centers had functioned in medieval Kerala which can be classified into regional or local trade and markets, long distance overland trade and long distance overseas trade.

The distinctive geophysical elements and socio-political events like the Brahmin- headed agrarian settlements and the founding of the kingdom of the Perumals of Mahodayapuram as the pivot of the second Chera kingdom provided a favourable climate for the growth and development of internal
markets, trade and overland and overseas trade. According to Keralolpathi there were 32 Brahmin settlements which were centered around river valleys. The spread of Brahmin settlements was accompanied by the proliferation of agriculture. Better technological devices and managerial strategies accelerated the growth of agriculture and the introduction of a variety of crops. Wetland paddy cultivation attained new momentum by this time.

Proliferation of agriculture necessitated the exchange of products in the market places. This led to the production of several non-agrarian products to be exchanged in the market with the agricultural products. Exchanges might have developed between the various tinais very much earlier before the establishment of the kingdom of the Perumals of Mahodayapuram in the 9th century A.D. During the medieval period many markets and centers of trade developed and they give us vestiges of ‘intertinai’ exchange.

We could observe a holistic change in the availability of sources for the study of markets, exchange and trade during the early medieval period comprising of A.D 800-1200. There is an aggregation of information other than, ballads, anthologies and oral narratives, but more direct and precise. Those documents expose multifarious dimensions of markets and exchange.

During the early centuries of the Christian era there were brisk trade contacts between the Roman world and south India. We have ample archaeological, epigraphic and literary evidences to believe this. Hoards of Roman aurei and pottery were discovered from various parts of Kerala and Tamilnadu which points to the vigorous Indo-Roman trade in the early centuries of the Christian era. Contemporary Tamil classical writers, Greco-Roman authors like Ptolemy and Pliny and the author of the Periplus of the Erythrean Sea provides information regarding the Indo-Roman trade.

A decline in Roman trade with south India is witnessed by the fifth century A.D following the decline of the Roman Empire. Contemporaneous was the condescending of the Sangam Age or the Classical Age and also the
principal kingdoms of south India— the Cheras, Cholas and the Pandyas. Anyhow the Chera, Chola and Pandya powers were revived during the eighth and ninth centuries. Between the close of the classical period and the rise of the monarchies of the Pallavas and the revival of the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas was a space of gloom in the history of south India. Historians attribute this to the ‘atrocious’ invasion of the Kalabhras of which we lack information. This gloomy situation disappears by about the sixth century A.D with the establishment of the Pallava kingdom of Kanchi having ample epigraphic, archaeological literary and alien evidences. The seven years following the ordainment of Pallava kingdom (A.D 600) and the disintegration of the Chola kingdom witness the development of the various economic activities in south India of which the functions of the several trade organizations and guilds are worthy of special mention. Anjuvannam, manigramam, nanadesi, valanciyar and ayyavole are some examples. Their organizational and conceptual aspects are also discussed in the following pages.

As Kerala was part of the early Tamilakam we have to rely for the information regarding the economic life of Kerala on Tamil classical accounts and medieval Malayalam literature including the sandesakavyas and champus along with other epigraphic, archaeological and numismatic evidences. Purananuru, one of the classical anthologies, describes in detail the gifts given to bards by the chieftains for praising them, the paddy fields etc. It mentions the production of surplus, a distributive economy and the bountifulness of their chieftains. Maduraikanci of Pattupattu compilations has excellent narrations of the sound of the drawing of water with thulam and thekotta, threshing of sheaves by oxen with chimes from their necks, the howling of the farmers or guards to scare the birds eating cereals etc. The classic Padirupattu contains ten songs praising Chera chiefs. It gives beautiful narrations of pulam, paddy, plantain, kazhmanellu, varambu (ridge) etc.

The medieval Malayalam literature, especially the Campu kavyas and Sandesa kavyas are rich in elucidation of farming activities. Unniyaccicaritam
(13 C. A.D) tells us about varieties of paddy cultivated in this period. Kokasandesam (14 C. A.D) tells us about the making of balks in paddy field during the rainy reason and ploughing and gliding the fields for sowing seeds. Unnickirutevicaridham (14 C. A.D) describes the punchanilam of Valluvanadu. The same describes the cultivation of pepper vines, sugarcane, coconut and arecanut trees, places with mango trees, jack trees, beautiful paddy fields etc.

Growth and development of agriculture in the hinterlands brought about the plentiful availability of surplus. The surplus food grains, other agricultural crops etc. were to be exchanged for other necessities. More surplus necessitated more quantity of exchange and the increase in the quantum of commodities and of exchange brought this process out of rural households to distinctive places. These distinctive locations gradually developed as markets and trading centers and sometimes urbans centers or nagaram. Agricultural production was the main stay of the economy of Kerala in the medieval period up to the last decades of the 16th century A.D, though this century witnessed the advent of European traders and vigorous trading activities. Land was given much importance as it was the main source of production. Agricultural settlements spread in the river valleys around various chiefdoms and swarupams.

Cultivation of food grains was the main feature of agricultural production. Paddy was the main crop of food. The wetlands with paddy cultivation were referred by various names such as nilam, kandam, ela, padag, punjai etc. according to the regional changes. Laterite hills that were interspersed with paddy fields were known as parambu. Terms such as vayal and kari were also popular. Fruit trees like jack, tamarind, vegetables such as cucumber, pulses and roots were grown

The unique environmental peculiarities of Malabar supported the growth of several varieties of pepper, cardamom and ginger. Cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves were also cultivated. Pulses, other grains like chamai and thinai were also cultivated. The parmbus and forests produced various species of trees such
as teak, ven teak, veetti, trimbakam, angili, arani, mahagoni. The agriculturists mainly depended on different seasons for crops. The technology relied by the agriculturists belonged to the low level rural technology. The agrestic slaves depended on simple tools and implements which resulted in low level production.

Major findings and conclusions are summarized in the fifth Chapter