CHAPTER-I

MUSLIM COMMUNITY OF MALABAR

1.1 MALABAR - HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The region Malabar as it is known today is a creation of the British by the end of the 18th century; after the decline of the Mysorean Empire of Tipu Sultan. But the history of Malabar can be traced back to centuries. The geographical position of Malabar covers only six districts of today’s Kerala. The land of Malabar covers the contracted coastal strip surrounded by the Western Ghats on the east and Arabian Sea on the west in the southern part of the Indian Peninsula. But according to Sardar K.M. Panikkar, “... ancient Malabar extended from Mount Eli or Mount Deli (Ezhimala) to Cape Comorin (Kanyakumari). It forms a single geographical and ethnical component, preserving in many ways a singularity of customs and social organisation which mark it of as a separate entity in the Indian sub-continent”.1 Its gifted geographical setting and atypical features have provided a marked distinctiveness to the region and was also a blessing to make sure the acceleration of its wide-ranging trade and for vibrant contacts with the countries of outside world.2

It is interesting to note that the term ‘Malabar’ (Kerala was alternatively known as Malabar in ancient times) is partly of a foreign origin. As stated by a renowned Kerala historian, A Sreedhara Menon, even from the time of Cosmas Indicopleustes3 of Alexandria (6th century CE), the region was referred to as Male by the Arab navigators. But the term Malabar perhaps first used by the well-known Arab writer was Albiruni

1 K. M. Panikkar, Malabar and the Portuguese (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1997), p. 1. See also William Wilson Hunter, A History of British India, Vol. I (New Delhi: Indian Reprints Publishing Company, 1972); the Hebrew text of the Book of Kings and Chronicles - in the list of articles of merchandise bought up from the intermediate marts of the Euphrates valley (1000 BC), an Indian origin is plausibly ascribed - the ivory of which Solomon made a great throne, his precious stones and three hundred shields of beaten gold, the traffic of the spice merchants, the apes and peacocks of his pleasure gardens, and probably the sandalwood pillars for the House of the Lord might be from Malabar.
(973-1048CE) to denote the region. His famous work, *Kitāb fi Tahqīqī Mālīl Hind* was written in 11th century CE. However, the terms *Malibar, Manibar, Mulibar* and *Munibar* was randomly used by Arab writers to describe the land. The term Malabar is an amalgamation of two words, the Malayalam word ‘*mala*’ (mountain) and the Arabic word ‘*barr*’ (land) thus forming Malabar. Otherwise, it must have been derived by the Arab writers from the mixture of Persian - Malayalam, ‘*bār*’ (enormous) and ‘*mala*’ (mountain) the land of enormous mountains.

Malabar has from the earliest times, been in direct contact with the sea-faring people of the West. The main trade route in the ancient times as in the present day lay through the Arabian coast and the Red Sea, and through them the trade of Malabar thrived in to Europe. The earliest trade contact with the Malabar Coast also traced out to the Phoenician as the curious culture like ear-lobbing, shank worship and other elements of heliolithic culture have been found there in the Malabar region. It has been held on philological evidence that the Hebrews, at the time of Solomon, knew of Malabar. Cinnamon and cassia, which are produced mainly in Malabar and Ceylon and are foreign to Palestine, were much in use among the Hebrews.

The whole course of trade with India underwent great change when in 45 CE. The discovery of the Monsoon winds by the navigator, Hippalus was remarkable enough to change the maritime of trade history of the world. “From that time it may be said that that Western trade with Malabar ports has been continuous and unbroken.” As this discovery synchronised with the great development of Roman power in the East, there grew up between the Malabar Ports and the Roman Empire an up-and-coming “trade of no mean volume and importance”. Roman Merchants might have regularly visited Malabar Ports

---

4At the Eastern end of the Mediterranean, facing towards the west, and looking out on the Levantine Sea, or "Sea of the Rising Sun" was the scanty, but fortunately positioned tract which the Geeks and Romans knew as Phoenicia, or the "Region of Palms".
6He is the son of David, king of ancient Israel 970-930 BC. During his reign he extended the kingdom of Israel to the border with Egypt and the Euphrates, and became famous both for his wisdom and for the magnificence of his palaces. In the Bible, Solomon is traditionally associated with the Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs; the Wisdom of Solomon in the Apocrypha is also ascribed to him.
and the trade in spices grew to such importance that when Alaric\(^8\) invaded Rome in 408CE, “he demanded and obtained, as part of the ransom, three thousand pounds of pepper, then, as now, the main product of Malabar”.\(^9\) At that time the main centre of trade and commerce in Malabar was Muziris or Cranganore (Kodungallur). The exports of Malabar consisted mainly of high quality pearl, pepper in large quantities and a variety of gems. The imports were mostly coral, lead, tin etc. It is noteworthy to mention that the trade which the Portuguese carried on at a later time was practically in the same commodities as those in which the Romans carried out with Malabar in the ancient time.

Calicut had risen to great prominence by the beginning of the 14th century, chiefly on account of the preference shown to the port by the Muslim merchants. The phenomenal growth of Calicut by the time of Ibn Battûta\(^10\)’s visit (1342-1347 CE) made it one of the most prosperous towns in the whole of the Malabar Coast. Abdur–Razzâq, the Persian ambassador to the Court of the Zamorin, who visited Calicut in 1442 described the city thus: “Security and justice are so firmly established in this city that the most wealthy merchants bring towards that place from maritime countries, considerable cargos which they unload and unhesitatingly send into the markets and bazaars, without thinking at the meantime of any necessity of checking account or keeping watch over the goods. The officers of the custom house take it upon themselves the charge of looking after the merchandise, over which they keep watch night and day when a sale is affected, they levy a duty on the goods of one-fortieth part; if they are not sold, and they make no change whatsoever”.\(^11\)

In 1498 CE, Vasco da Gama with his team of Portuguese traders and Catholic Christian missionaries dropped anchor off at Pantalayini in Calicut. Contrary to their expectations they found an extremely unfavourable environment in Malabar.Obviously

\(^8\) Alaric (370-410 CE), king of the Visigoths, Alaric invaded Greece (395-6 CE) and then Italy (400-3CE), but was checked on each occasions by the Roman general Stilicho (365-418 CE). He invaded Italy again in 408 and in 410 and captured Rome.
\(^10\) The Moroccan traveller, from 1325 to 1354, he journeyed through North and West Africa, India, and China, writing a vivid account of his travels in the Rihlah
\(^11\) Major R H (ed.); India in the Fifteenth Century (New Delhi: Deep Publications, 1974), P.11
reason for this was that the Arabs had already taken the Hindu kings of Malabar by them into their confidence. Not only had they established firm and long standing foothold there, but also many of the descendents of the Arabs and the newly converted Muslims were in the service of these Rajas. In this context it is highly significant to mention the powerful positions of the Kunjalis who were the captains of the Zamorin's navel fleet. The Portuguese could not tolerate the prevailing circumstances any more. They tried their level best to create intrigues, distrust and rift between the Rajas and Kunjalis intended to weaken the Arab influence and their trade monopoly in the Malabar region.

According to Sir William Wilson Hunter,\textsuperscript{12} the Portuguese might have searched India in vain for a spot better suited to their purpose. Their three objectives were conquest, commerce and conversion. For each of these three objectives, the Malabar Coast strip afforded free scope. Its chiefs were too petty to resist even a small European power. They welcomed foreign merchants as the greater part of their revenues consisted of dues on sea-trade. They allowed liberty of religion in their little shore domains and they were accustomed to a local population of Jews and Christians whose political existence in India dated from a period more ancient than their own.

Innumerable cases of cruelty and treachery perpetrated by the Portuguese in Malabar from the very beginning created in the local population a feeling of hatred and distrust towards them. The Portuguese pursued a policy of unscrupulous adventurism, oppressing the native people mercilessly and plundering them. Their unethical acquisition of fabulous wealth by illicit means resulted in causing manifold miseries and untold sufferings among the local inhabitants.

1.2 MALABAR AND ITS ANCIENT TRADE RELATIONS

Malabar had a great maritime trade tradition from time immemorial. Its history presents an eventful record of contacts with other countries, not only with its neighbours beyond the Ghats, but also with the countries far beyond the sea, both on the west and on

\textsuperscript{12} Sir William Wilson, Op.cit, p. 95
The Sangham Literature mentions about the voyages of the people of Tamilakam (Tamilnadu) to foreign countries. The Chera Rulers of Mahodayapuram had a well-preserved navy. This great maritime tradition in the ancient times was kept going during the medieval period. Among the rulers of medieval Kerala, the credit for the maintenance of navy goes to Samuthiris, the then rulers of Calicut.

The widely spread coastline and the availability of spices attracted foreign merchants to the Malabar Coast from very early times. The inhabitants of Kerala subsist to a large degree on rice and coconut cultivation while also producing crops which for centuries were some of the most coveted commodities in international trade: ginger, cardamom, pepper, aromatic woods, and hardwoods. The Bible and early Greek and Roman writers bear testimony to this fact. Referring to Solomon's period the Old Testament says that in this period gold was obtained from Ophir and once in three years came the navy of Thashis bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks. All these objects, except gold, were products of Malabar and the Hebrew lines for the last two objects, Kapin and Tukin are obviously the Tamil Kavi and Thikai. In due of this, it's not perhaps an altogether idle fancy which identifies Ophir with Beypore a port near Calicut at the mouth of the river of the same name which is famed for its auriferous sands. The similarity between the Greek names of rice (orizi), ginger (zinziber), cinnamon (karpon) and the Malayalam ari, inji and karpooram indicates that trade existed in these articles between Greece and Malabar, the only part of India where all these products grow in abundance. From the dawn of history, Arabian cargo ships used to come to Indian ports carrying various commodities exchange to the ports of Bahrain, Oman, Yemen, and Muscat etc. From there, Arab traders carried these commodities through land to Hijaz and from there to Egypt and Syria by the Red Sea. From there these commodities used to be sent to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea.

---

17 Ahmad Amin, Fajrul Islam (Cairo, 1964), p. 53.
The conquest of Egypt by the Romans about 30 BC made them masters of the trade route to the east. Hippalus’ discovery of the possibility of sailing straight across the Arabian Sea by the aid of the south west monsoon had an immense impact upon commerce in the first century CE\textsuperscript{18}. For some centuries after the time of Ptolemy\textsuperscript{19}, trade was carried on steadily with the Roman Empire. It is said that considerable Roman settlement existed at Crangannore (Kodungallor) which was the greatest metropolis of trade on the coast near Cochin (present day). Roman coins which had found their way into Malabar during that period has been dug at various places on the west coast. They belong to the reigns of Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius and Nero\textsuperscript{20}.

According to an eminent historian of Kerala, A.P. Ebrahim Kunju, from very early times, Malabar and the West Asian countries of Arabia, Syria and Egypt had wide-ranging maritime trade contacts. Till the establishment of the Roman Empire\textsuperscript{21}, the trade monopoly was in the hands of the Arab merchants\textsuperscript{22}. Kerala has been continuing trade relations with many parts of the world since very ancient times. It is difficult to say exactly how many years of trade links Kerala has had with foreign countries. It is assumed that India has had trade relations with foreign countries for over 3000 years. Among Kerala’s foreign trade relations, those with the Arab world were the most important. The name of the sea along the Kerala coast being called the Arabian Sea itself is a testimony for that. Traditions and legends apart, this much is certain that from the earliest times there had been commercial relations between Malabar and the Far East on the one hand, and with Arabia, Egypt and the Countries in Europe on the other.

\textsuperscript{18}C.A.Innes, Op.cit. p.31., See also K.K.N Krur and K.M Mathew, \textit{Native Resistance Against the Portuguese: The Saga of Kunjali Marakkars} (University of Calicut, 2000), pp.30-31., See also K.M Mohamed, “Arab Relations with the Malabar Coast From 9\textsuperscript{th} to 16\textsuperscript{th} Centuries” in \textit{Proceeding of the Indian History Congress, 60\textsuperscript{th} Section}, Calicut, 1999, p.227.
\textsuperscript{19}Ptolemy, (2\textsuperscript{nd} century) Greek astronomer and geographer.
\textsuperscript{21}Roman Empire, the empire established by Augustus in 27 BC and divided by Theodosius in 395CE into the Western or Latin and Eastern or Greek Empires.
\textsuperscript{22}A.P Ebrahim Kunju, \textit{Studies in Medieval Kerala History} (Thiruvananthapuram: 1975), p.11.
According to Ahmad Amin, for the people of Yemen, India was not new and they had old relations with India and the East. He further states that the Arab trading was in the hands of Yemenites who carried Indian imported goods to Syria and Egypt\(^23\). From the very beginning, Yemen was a very big market for Indian commodities and most of the traders sold their goods in Yemen. And Basra was the main port, where the Indian commodities, were carried by ships\(^24\). These merchants supplied the Egyptians precious stones, muslin, spices and frankincense which they used in worship and mummification.

The trade, both coastal and overseas, was dominated mainly by Muslim mercantile communities, though Jews, Chettis from Corromandal, and Vaniyas from Gujarat all traded in from Calicut and other ports\(^25\). With the conquest of Western Asia by the Persians, there was great development in trade between India and Western Asia. Dariaus the Great (521-486 BC) organized many mercantile expeditions to link Persia with India and Egypt, by sea as well as by land\(^26\). His captains sailed down the Indus and thence around Arabia to Egypt. As a result of these operations trade greatly developed and naturally Malabar’s trade with Western Asia must have increased considerably\(^27\). The trade of Kerala consisted of its own products and products collected from other countries in the course of trade. Its own products were ivory, cinnamon, pepper and ginger, while the products collected from elsewhere particularly consisted of silk and fine cotton fabrics, hides, cloves, jewels and pearls. The imports comprised wine, bronze, tin, gold and various manufactured articles. The spices of Kerala fetched high prices\(^28\).

Pepper had a central place in Westerner’s dishes. The Babylonians, the Phoenicians, the Israelites, the Greeks, the Romans, the Chinese and others were those who had commercial contacts with Malabar (Kerala) in the ancient times. Ibn Batūta

\(^{23}\)Ahmad Amin, *Op cit.*, P.13
\(^{24}\)Muhiyiddin Alwaye, *Al Da’watul Islamiyah wa Tatawwuruha fi Shib’il Qārratil Hindiyah* (Damascus: Darul Qalam, 1971), P. 53
\(^{25}\)V. Kunhali, (ed.), *Calicut in History* (Tenhippalam:Publication Division, University of Calicut, 2004), P.92
\(^{26}\)He developed commerce, building a network of roads, exploring the Indus valley, and connecting the Nile with the Red Sea by canal.
\(^{27}\)Ibid. P.3
\(^{28}\)Ibid.
(1304-1368CE) the Moroccan traveller, who visited India in the 14th century, describe in detail the trade relations, Malabar had with other countries. Many traders from Persia and Yemen came here. Calicut was the largest harbour in Malabar. Traders reached here not only from China, Java, Persia and Yemen but also from different parts of the world. Calicut harbour has inhabited by a large number of people and had numerous warehouses. A large number of traders from Ethiopia, Serbad, Senjubar, Mecca, Hijaz stayed here. Examples of Arab influence can be gleaned from words like Sandal (Al sondaal), Tamarind (Tamrul Hind) etc. which emerged from pure Arabic

Arab tribes attached great importance to war equipments and most of the swords were imported from India. Indian swords were well known for extreme sharpness and it was very often mentioned in the classical Arabic poetry and was one of the dominant themes apart from other things.

Thus a positive geographical factor was the prime reason for the international exposure of Malabar Coast to the Arabs and Chinese. Later the Europeans also reached there and established a foothold in the Indian peninsula in the post-medieval period. Many vessels, which sailed from Aden to Calicut, Kollam, Colombo and Coromandal shores after crossing the Malacca straits, proceeded up to Shanghai, their final trade destination.

Thus, Calicut became the most important and closet transit centre of the Arab traders in storing and exchanging their goods carried from China in the warehouse at Calicut. In the regular and prolonged up and down voyages, from Aden to Shanghai, the Arab sailors and traders found at Calicut, a suitable place of rest and resort. These were some of the positive factors for the temporary settlement of a large number of Arabs at Calicut, Ponnani, Telicheri and Kannur.

---

1.3 MALABAR AND ITS RELATIONS WITH THE ARAB WORLD

From ancient days itself, the Arabs carried trading goods to the Mediterranean region from India and other South-East Asian countries. In response to that, goods from Rome also reached here. Traders from Egypt and other places, taking the sea route, landed at the South-East coast of Arabian Peninsula and to the South of Iran. They reached Sind and Malabar by ships. Traders having their destination to China first halted along Kerala harbours, especially Calicut and Kollam.

Even long before Alexander’s exodus, the Arabs had been coming to Malabar. It was through the Persian Gulf that Malabar goods reached the southern coast of Arabia. Then, from there, they were carried by Arab business groups to Tadmür of Syria and Alexandria of Egypt. They used to throng countries like Yemen and Hijaz. European businessmen brought them from there and took them to their markets. In older days the intermediaries of trade between India, Greek and Rome were Arabs, Egyptians and Syrians. In Arabia the trade centre of Malabar goods was Dafar of Hadarmouth shore. The people of this place directly conducted business with Malabar. From the books in the Old Testament of the Bible it is understood that during the period of prophets like Dawood and Sulaiman, the Israelites had commercial contacts with Malabar. It was known to the Greeks and to the Romans that most goods sold by the Arabs were from India. But they didn’t know the route to India.

Many western countries had tried to get hold of the Arabs’ trade monopoly with Kerala. The main maritime trade routes in ancient times, as in the present day, lay through the Arabian cost and the red sea; and through them the trade of Malabar flourished into Europe. There is ample evidence of other kinds also to prove the close contacts of Malabar with the Euphrates valley and the Mediterranean countries. Logs of

Indian teak have been found in the Temple of The Moon at Mughair and in the Palace of Nebuchadnezzar. We have many instances in the classical Arabic Literature of the old connection between the Arabs and the people of Malabar. One of the great classical poets Imriul Qais who lived prior to the Prophet Muhammad, compared the granule dropping of white antelope to pepper pellets which spread over the dry land. He describes the remnants of his lover's residence thus:

"The globule droppings of white antelope, being scattered on the courtyard and the remnants of her old home. It seems like the pellets of pepper."34

Certain excerpts from another classical poem are in order here indicative of the Indo-Arab acquaintances and ancient connections. One of the authors of the famous 'Seven Odes' of pre-Islamic period Tarafah articulates in his odes:

"I' m that man-at-arms whom you have known slender-trimmed like the head of a fiery snake. While I return, no bulky field men remain due to the sparkling white, sharp sides of the Indian sword".35

While narrating the courageousness of the Arab womenfolk in the battle field the legendary poet Antaratu-bin-Shaddād put into words that:

"Out of their ardent compassion and sincere love to the headman of their tribe, women boldly protect their master with their bare hands:
As he shouldn't be killed or be trampled down under their enemies' feet, or be weakened by the spear, which has reached the Port of Oman.
The Indian sword has actually afflicted and has made him almost dead."36

---

35 Tarafat bin-al Abd (ed.), Divwān Tarafat bin-al- Abd Dār-al-Ka'b. Beirut p.52 (nd.).
1.3.1 THE ADVENT OF ISLAM AND FORMATION OF A MUSLIM SOCIETY IN MALABAR

The most important development of the 7th century CE was the birth and explosive advancement of Islam. The appearance of Islam in Mecca which was the nerve centre for trade and cultural activities of Hijaz in that period was one of the factors which hastened the spread of Islam in other areas. It is well known that Prophet Muhammad was a very prominent businessman. Indian commodities thronged the Hijaz Market of those days. This trade relation was in existence from pre-Islamic period and served as a vehicle in the spreading of Islam in the Indian sub-continent and its growth.37 “Long before Arabia became Muhammadan, the Arabs had planted colonies and their trade establishments all along the Western seaboard of India and especially the Malabar coast, giving rise to a mixed population, the progenitors of the Mappilas”.38

A description and analysis of the long-distant trade of Asia, following the weakening of the Mediterranean economy in the aftermath of the Roman Empire, should perhaps begin with events connected with the rise of Islam. The new religion preached by Muhammad, and the astonishing military success of the Arab leaders succeeding the Prophet, have always impressed historians as being in need not only of religious and political explanations but also of a reconstruction of the economic environment.39

With the expansion of Islam as an accelerating force of state formation with and outside the Arabian Peninsula, the Arabs were forced to come to terms with the Sea.40 Although Hindu India and the islands of the Indonesian archipelago were not to be brought within the orbit of Islamic world for another four centuries, the commercial expansion of Muslim merchants and traders across the Indian Ocean to South Asia and

40 Ibid.p.43
China is historically recorded from as early as the eighth century.\textsuperscript{41} There is no evidence of any religious animosity towards the Muslims in either India or China at that time. That the rise of Islam and the revitalising of the Mediterranean economy under Arab leadership exercised a significant impact on trans-oceanic trade seems fairly certain.\textsuperscript{42} From the end of the tenth century to the middle of the fifteenth, important changes took place both in the direction of the Indian Ocean - trade and in the larger aspects of its political, religious and artistic traditions. In India, the Turkish Sultanate of Delhi conquered Gujarat in 1303-04CE, and its rich maritime town were now within the reach of Islamic social and political influence.\textsuperscript{43}

In keeping with the view of Himanshu Prabha Ray, information from historical and archaeological sources indicates that seafaring communities cut across ethnic boundaries and lines. While trade provided an important motive for sea travel, it was by no means the only reason for travel by sea and needs to be studied within a wider perspective of seafaring activity and maritime contacts. The role of ideologies, such as those of Buddhism or Islam, in motivating and supporting seafaring activity needs to be recognised and accepted. The role of the sea routes as channels for the spread of ideas and beliefs across the Indian Ocean needs serious attention, especially in the light of the fact that such exchanges led to the efflorescence of a shared cultural heritage.\textsuperscript{44}

In the three centuries preceding the emergence of Islam, the Nestorian Church exerted an amalgamating influence on the region's population, both among the tribes of northern Arabia and among the settled communities of the Coast. Building on the unity forged by Christianity in an earlier period, the spread of Islam was able to expand the frontiers of the trading network.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid. p.44  
\textsuperscript{42}Ibid. p. 44  
\textsuperscript{43}Ibid. p.58  
\textsuperscript{44}Himanshu Prabha Ray, “Early Seafaring Communities in the Indian Ocean”, The Western Indian Ocean: Essays on Island and Islanders(The Haasam Toorawa Trust), pp.21-48  
\textsuperscript{45}Ibid.
When Islam swept over Arabia, its influence was felt immediately over Kerala also. Soon after the dawn of Islam in Arabia, the faith was widely spread in the land of Malabar as well, and the fact that there was an already a sizeable body of the non-Muslim Mappilas in Malabar, smoothened the advancement of this new faith in to the length and breadth of this of the Indian sub-continent. This must have accelerated probably, about the later part of the 9th century CE.46

Islam began to spread by conversion, immigration and settlement of the Arab traders and others. The early Arab settlements were especially important in Malabar. It was the policy of the local rulers to afford encouragement to these traders at all the ports. After 13th century, the Arab merchants and the native Muslim community made headway in the mercantile activities of Malabar as well as the advancement of local population. They had won the good will of the Zamorins (the then rulers) of Calicut for the service they rendered to them, in the first place, by broadening privileged circumstances and prosperity of the country by trade and commerce. Subsequently, the Muslim community always ensured a shoulder to the wheel of conquests, which the Zamorins were constantly carrying on with their neighbours, and also against the subordinate principalities. These were the heavenly days of the Muslim society of Malabar, and thus they kept it up in increasing prosperity right up to the dawn of the 16th century.47

In accordance with a fairly ancient tradition, the last Perumāl (emperor of Kerala) himself became a convert to Islam. The exact date of the spread of Islam associated with the conversion of Chēraman Perumāl and the work of a Muslim missionary group headed by Mālik bin Dinār, is not known. The original sources of information for these are ‘Keralolpathi’ a work in Malayalam about the early history of Kerala, ‘Rihlatul Mutūk’ a book in Arabic written by Umar bin Muhammad Suhrawardi and Tulfatul Mujāhidīn of Sheikh Zainuddīn. All these three books refer to the Kerala emperor embracing Islam.

proceeding to Mecca and sending a Muslim missionary group to the West Coast. The exact period of the conversion of Chēraman Perumāl is not known.\footnote{Syed Mohideen Shah, \textit{Islam in Kerala}, (Souvenir, International Malayalam Seminar, Trivandrum: University of Kerala, 1979), p.108.}

It is a disputed point as to when Islam originated in Kerala. The tradition current among both Muslims and Hindus connect the event with the immigration of Chēraman Perumāl, the last Perumāl ruler of Kerala to Arabia. According to the Muslim tradition, a few Muslim pilgrims to Adam’s Peak in Ceylon visited the Perumāl, the then ruler of Kerala at Kodungallur. Hearing the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (570-632 CE) from the pilgrims, the Perumāl wanted to meet him and accept the new religion. He accompanied the pilgrims on their return to Mecca and he met the Prophet and accepted Islam at his hands. After some time, he planned to return to Kerala, but fell ill and died at Dafār on the Arabian coast. Before his death he wrote letters to his principal officers and Governors calling upon them to provide all facilities to his companions, who carried the letter to spread Islam. Mālik bin Dinār and his associates, who accompanied the Perumāl on his return trip, landed at Kodungallur and travelled to different parts of the country to spread the faith of Islam. They established ten mosques where Muslims could congregate.\footnote{Hamza. C. (ed.), \textit{Sheikh Zainuddin’s Tuhfat-al-Mujahideen}, (Calicut: Al- Huda Books, 1996), P.28.}

Hindu tradition contained in the ‘Keralolpathi’ agrees in general with the Muslim tradition. The main difference is that before his immigration, the Perumāl partitioned his kingdom among his relatives and dependants. Another tradition states that in memory of the immigration of the Perumāl and partitioning of the kingdom, a new era known as the ‘Kollam Era’, was started in 824-25 CE.

Though the Muslim and Hindu traditions are in agreement about the immigration and conversion of the Perumāl, there are serious differences of opinions regarding the date of the event. If the Muslim tradition that the Perumāl visited the Prophet and accepted Islam at his hand is correct; it must have happened between 622 and 632 CE when the Prophet is said to have written to the concerned heads of several countries with
which the Arabs had close trade relations. It is possible that such a letter was sent to the
Kerala king also, whose country produced such spices as pepper, cloves and cardamom,
which were in great demand in the West Asian countries and Europe. If such a well-
known personality visited the Prophet, it could not have escaped mention in the vast
Hadith literature. In the absence of such evidence, it is difficult to conclude that a Kerala
king visited him and accepted Islam at his hands. There is difficulty to accept the Hindu
tradition either. The tradition of the partitioning of the country could not have taken place
in 824-25 CE on two grounds: first in that case it could not have coincided with the
lifetime of the Prophet; second, we have definite epigraphic evidence of the existence of
a strong all Kerala kingdoms between 800 and 1122 CE 50.

The authors of The Glorious Mappila Literary Heritage (Mal.) spare no pains to
prove that the Perumāl had visited the Prophet in Arabia. The chief evidence brought to
prove their contention is the alleged statement of Ali al Tabari in his famous Firdousul
Hikmah that the Perumāl had resided with Prophet for 17 days. But they have failed to
provide exact references 51.

Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai has noted that one of the Hindu kings from Kerala had
great respect for Islam and visited Arabia. He would have been a Perumāl or a relative of
Kolathiris and Zamorin, perhaps an ancestor or overlord of both. K.P. Padmanabha
Menon and some others consider that one of the Zamorins might have embraced Islam
and built mosques. Humayun Kabir in ‘Indian Heritage’ speaks of the fairly widely held
tradition that Kāladi where Sankara was born belonged to a small principality whose king
had accepted Islam 52.

“A king in India gifted the Prophet a jar packed with ginger. He distributed to
each of his disciples a piece of it. And they ate it. A piece was given to me also to eat”.

---

50 Kunju Ibrahim A. P., Origin and spread of Islam in Kerala in Kerala Muslims- A Historical Perspective,
51 Ibid. P.20
This was reported by Abu Abdillah al-Hakim from Abi Saeed-l-Khudri. This Hadith reveals that Islam came to Kerala during the period of Prophet Muhammad itself. Sheikh Zainuddin the author of Tuhfatul Mujahidin, writing towards the close of the 16th century, however expressed his belief that Islam must have originated in Kerala in the 9th century. He stated that "touching the exact time when this event occurred there is no certain information; but there appears good ground for the supposition that it happened about two hundred years after the flight the Prophet (to whom be all blessing and praise ascribed!). Notwithstanding that, amongst the Mahomedans of Malabar, the conversion to Islamism of he king (before alluded to) is believed to have taken place in the time of the Prophet (upon whom be blessing and peace!), it having been occasioned by that monarch’s perceiving in a vision, during night, the partition of the moon, which miraculous circumstance induced him to set upon a journey to visit the Prophet (upon whom be blessing and peace!), and having been blessed with an interview with him, he returned to the coast of Arabia, designing to return to Malabar with individuals before named, when he died there. There is, however, but little truth in this account. It is a fact, moreover, now well known to all, that the king was buried at Zofar, instead of the Arabian coast of the Red Sea, at which place his tomb can be seen by everyone, and is indeed now flocked to on account of its virtues. And the king, of whom this tale is told, is styled by the people of that part of the world, As Samuri..."

"Even this tradition is also open to question on chronological grounds. If the origin of Islam was in any way connected with immigration of a Perumāl to Arabia and the consequent partition of the country into kingdoms and chieftains as mentioned in the Hindu tradition, it could have happened only in the 12th century. It has now been conclusively proved by epigraphic evidence that a strong all Kerala kingdom flourished between 800 and 1122 CE. The last Perumāl Ramakulashekhara disappeared under

---

\(^{53}\)Abu-Abdillah-al-Hakim (nd.), Al-Mustadraaq Hyderabad Vol.4 P.35

strange circumstances, making it impossible to provide for succession to the throne, in consequence of which the kingdom broke into pieces"55.

In this legend there are many historical contradictions. The Muslims of Arabia at the time of the Prophet didn’t consider Adam’s Peak in Ceylon as a centre for Pilgrimage. The event of the splitting of the moon was not written by the ancestors, but is the saying of a companion of the Prophet. If the kingdom was partitioned among his relatives, friends and descendants, there were possibilities for smaller kingdoms. But in 1221 C.E the kingdom had been ruled by the Perumal with Kodungallur as the capital. If so the partition of the land must have happened after this.

Is Malik bin Dinār a name that can be brought up in all contexts? The historical Malik bin Dinār was a disciple of the famous Tābih (follower of the Prophet’s companion), Hassan ul Basiri and died in 175 HE56. If Malik bin Dinār was a Tābih, it was not possible for Chēraman Perumāl (Chēraman Rama Kulasekhara) to meet the Prophet. Even in the Tuhfatul Mujāhidin, it is written that the Chēraman Perumāl visited Arabia 200 years after, in 622 HE, i.e. 822 in the Christian era. There is doubt in the opinion about Malik bin Dinār’s family also. The historical Malik bin Dinār was not married. The mosques that Malik bin Dinār are reputed to have built were very big and costly. They do not seem to have been built for a community of new believers. It seems to have been built to cater to a large wealthy community of people. There does not seem to be any order in the development of these ten mosques from Kodungallur to Chaliyam. This story seems to have originated along with the development of strong Islamic communities on the Kerala coast.

Malik bin Dinār certainly did not have to come to Kerala for mosques in his name to spring up. They were probably built in respect of his name by his faithful disciples. After all, the great Iraqi Sufi saint Muhiyyuddin Abdul Qādir Jilānī had never visited Kerala and this didn’t stop his followers to build mosques in his name. Similar might

55 Narayanan, M. G. S. Perumāls of Kerala. (Calicut, 1990), P.65
have been the case of Mālik bin Dīnār. In short, as noted historian Ibrahīm Kunju has opined taking into account people of different ages and political circumstances, that the story of Mālik bin Dīnār might be a concocted one?  

If we keep aside the Chēraman Perumāl episode as data of the origin of Islam in Kerala, we have strong circumstantial evidence to prove that Islam came to Kerala as soon as it spread in Arabia. The evidence is that Arabia had trade relations with Western Indian ports long before the establishment of the Roman Empire in the 1st century CE. Thus it is clear that even before the rise of Islam in Arabia in the 7th century CE, Arabs had close commercial relations with Western Indian ports, especially with Kerala ports, as the spices and other products of Kerala were in great demand in the Markets of West Asia and Europe. For purpose of trade, Arab merchants used to live in colonies in the port towns of Kerala.

Ibn Batuta, the Moroccan traveller of 14th century, and other travellers have mentioned the existence of such colonies on the Kerala coast. As these traders did not bring their women to these commercial centres, they used to marry local women when they were here and it is easy to presume that these women and their children embraced the new religion. It is, therefore, logical to conclude that as soon as Islam spread all over Arabia in the lifetime of the Prophet, the Arab traders to Kerala must have spread the religion here. The new converts to Islam, in the first flush of enthusiasm, must have done everything possible to spread the new religion wherever they lived. Thus it is possible that Islam spread in Kerala as soon as it spread in Arabia. Whatever the authenticity of the story about the Chēra Emperor accepting Islam be, the origins of the Islamic faith in Kerala is inextricably linked with its rapid spread across the Arabian Peninsula during the 2nd half of 7th century CE. Both the people who accept and reject the Chēraman story support this fact.

Eminent historian, S.M. Mohammed Koya observes that formation of the Muslim community in Malabar is attributed to a system of marriage prevalent among

---

Arabs from time immemorial. The mut'a marriage enabled the Arabs to contract marriages of temporary nature with the native women of Malabar and those of other areas of South India. Also, Islam had come to these regions without any political help whatsoever and remained rooted in the soil for centuries, away from the turmoil of Mahmud’s invasions of India, and the struggle between the Cross and the Crescent in the world of the West. It is characteristic of the spread of Islam in Kerala that it could be called the work of immigrant Arab traders, which was constantly being reinforced by new arrivals. The first Muslims to reach the Malabar Coast could very well have been these sailors and traders, who before their conversion to Islam and after might have frequented the ports of Malabar. The lower castes who suffered under the existing social order welcomed Islam as a chance to secure some degree of social freedom. Not only were conversions allowed but also those who were converted to Islam were accepted in the society. The encouragement and support extended by rulers was also instrumental in promoting conversions to Islam. A large number of Tangals visited Kerala and played a significant role in the propagation of Islam and settled there. It was the work done by these saintly persons that facilitated the rise of towns such as Ponnani and Cannanore as centres of Muslim learning. Mappilas, the Muslims of Calicut and the whole Malabar Coast (the present-day Kerala Coast) were not only given the freedom to convert the people to their faith but, also granted monopoly of export and import trade.

In the medieval period the Muslims of Malabar Coast were mainly a trading community. They were concentrated to the coastal towns. Their leadership was in the hands of the Arab merchants who had established themselves mainly at Calicut and Cannanore. Their influence was mainly with the rulers of these two states whose prosperity depended mostly on the export trade in pepper and spices. These rulers were depended on commerce as a major source of their income. The first Muslim settlement grew up on the coast around mosques founded by the earliest Muslim missionaries. Also the Arab Muslim traders had their warehouses and settlements and it was around these

59 The term “tangal” is originated from a Malayalam form of an honorary title with polite address and is mainly applied to the Muslim high priests of Kerala, who hailed from various parts of the Middle East. Their ancestors claimed to be from the Prophet’s family (otherwise called Sayyids).
settlements that the local Muslim community grew up. In terms of population distribution Muslims were evidently settled in every port of consequence with the majority living in Malabar, especially in Calicut and the other coastal trading towns within the Zamorin’s sphere of influence such as Chaliyam, Parappanangādi, Thanur and Ponnani. It is said that the concentration of Muslim traders in this area established the basic settlement patterns which shaped the growth of the Mappila Muslim population in later centuries.  

According to Dr. Shamsullah Qadiri, at the time of the arrival of Vasco da Gama, the Muslim community was prominently settled in Kodungaloor, Pallippuram, Vaippu, Edavanakkadu in the South Malabar; Chaliyam, Kozhikode, Parapanangādi, Thirurangādi, Thanur, Paravanna, Ponnani, and Velliyankodu in the Central Malabar; and in Mangalapuram, Kasarkodu, Pazhayangadi, Nadapuram, Valapattanam, Kannur, Dharmadam, Chemmalodu, Thiruvankodu, Edakadu, Koyilandy, Thikkody and Kunnukadu in the North Malabar.

Stephen F. Dale observes: Venad was probably the oldest beneficiary of the spice trade in Kerala, which seems to have been concentrated in central and southern Kerala from Roman times through the Chēra period. However, in later centuries the main focal point of trade and commerce seems to have transferred to Kollam, or Quilon. "Quilon continued to be an important port well into the Portuguese period, but by the end of the fifteenth century the focus of trade had again shifted, this time to northern Kerala…"

It is interesting to note that, in that very same period itself, another significant Arab presence and settlement was at Kollam, located around 70 kilometres north of Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Kerala; which was a major harbour and hub of

60 Ibid
64 Ibid.
commercial activities of those days. There also the Arabs married native women, converted and influenced others also to absorb Islamic culture and way of life. In southern Kerala, it was Kollam which was one of the major maritime trade centres from the ancient period; more than ever it was in the 9th and 10th centuries the Arab maritime trade relations flourished.

That particular period, the Kulasekhara Empire (800-1102CE) of Mahodayapuram constituted a “Golden Age” in Kerala history. The southern most province of the Kulasekhara Empire was known as Venad. It included within itself the vicinity now covered in the Quilon (Kollam), Kottarakkara Chirayinkil Taluks and parts of Thiruvanathapuram and Nedumangad Taluks and had its capital at Quilon. To the north of Venad lay Odanad which comprised of Karunagappally, Karthikappally and Allepey and its Capital at Kayamkulam. During those period trade relations with countries outside world was progressing well. Sulaiman and Masüdi, the Arab travellers who visited the Kollam coast during that period, have testified to the high morals of the people as well as to the high degree of economic prosperity achieved by the empire from its extensive foreign trade. Also the former makes specific mention of the vigorous Arab trade with China.65

Considering the above facts, one cannot rule out the possibilities of the Muslim presence and the Arab settlements in these parts of the Indian sub-continent right from the 7th century itself. For the reason that, “at the time of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), China was considered the most developed civilization of the period66. Islam began in China during the Caliphate of Uthmān bin Affān (alaihi rahmah), the third Caliph. After triumphing over the Byzantine, Romans and the Persians. Uthmān bin Affān, dispatched

---

66 From Hadith. one can trace that how the Arab had given importance not only for trade but to point out the significance of acquiring knowledge, “Seek knowledge even unto China”. The ancient records of the Tang Dynasty testifies the Arab trade relationship with China and the history of the birth of Islam in China (650-51CE). To show his admiration for Islam, the emperor Yung Wei ordered the establishment of China’s first mosque. The magnificent Canton city mosque known to this day as the ‘Memorial Mosque’ still stands today after fourteen centuries. One of the first settlements in China was established in this port city. The Umayyads and Abbasids sent six delegations to China, all of which were warmly received and welcomed by the Chinese emperor. (http://chinese-school.netfirms.com/Muslims.html; also see http://www.chinats.com/shanghai232.htm).
a deputation to China in 29HE (650CE, eighteen years after the Prophet's death), under
the leadership of Sa'ad bin Abi Waqas (alaihi rahma), the Prophet's maternal uncle,
inviting the Chinese emperor to embrace Islam."... Since it was one of the major
centres of trade and commercial activities, the Arab maritime traders, need to halt at
Kollam, on their long journey to China. As one of the oldest mosques in Kerala, the
Jonakappuram Mosque situated at Kollam, as a corroborative mark regarding the
aforesaid facts. The author of Thfatul Mujahidin, Sheikh opines that this mosque at
Kollam built by Malk bin Habib (nephew of Malik bin Dinar), taking all his personal
belongings set out towards Kollam with his wife and some of his children. He built a
mosque at Kūlam (Kollam).

Along the lines of Stephen F. Dale, inscriptional evidence demonstrates that
Muslims resided in Kerala by the ninth century CE; but the earliest existing account of an
established Kerala Muslim community dates only from the mid-fourteenth century, when
the itinerant North African (the Moroccan), Ibn Batuta, visited the Malabar Coast on his
way from Delhi to China. Ibn Batuta's knowledge of Kerala was limited by his lack of
knowledge of Malayalam, the Dravidian language spoken by the majority of the
indigenous population, and he showed little interest in the sociology of the Muslim
community there, but he did record valuable information on the character, size and
institutions of that community. In general, his observations showed that Kerala Muslims
shared the Arabic, Islamic culture which characterized most of the Muslim communities
which were scattered along the Indian Ocean trade routes, extending from East Africa to
Arabia to India and Indonesia and even to Canton on the South China coast. Most of the
individuals whose homelands he identified were either merchants or ulamas from Arabia
or the Persian Gulf region, although some came from as far away as East Africa and the
interior of Iran. Traders from Iraq, Bahrain and Quādies from Baghdad and Oman are
specifically mentioned. The Arabian Peninsula or Persian Gulf origin of Muslims who
lived and traded in Kerala was confirmed by their observance of the Shāfi school of

69 Stephen F. Dale, Trade, Conversion and the Growth of the Islamic Community of Kerala, South India,
Studia Islamica, No.71 (1990) pp.155-75; See also, Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier: The
Mappillas of Malabar, 1498-1922 (Clarendon Press, Oxford)
Islamic jurisprudence, which was and is the predominant madhhab in the Muslim communities throughout the Indian Ocean area.

1.3.2 SOCIAL, POLITICAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF THE MUSLIM SETTLEMENT

According to Roland E. Miller, Islam grew (in Malabar) as it began, peacefully, and it grew steadily. The conditions of that growth were ideal. The two important factors of mutual economic interest and religious tolerance were interacting in a balanced and positive manner. Political and religious imperialism was absent or next to absent. Islam was making headway quite peacefully and without adopting jingoistic methods. Specific factors involved in the growth of the Muslim community up to the time of the European encroachment included: immigration, intermarriage, missionary activity, the support of the Zamorin, and personal advantage.

Apart from conveying an impression of the character and extent of the Kerala Muslim community, Ibn Batuta revealed that these Muslims had, by the fourteenth century, assembled the institutional and professional infrastructure of an Islamic society. He not only described the existence of substantial mosque buildings in the towns which he visited but often specified as well the principal ulama who perform official duties at these mosques, such as Fakhruddin Uthmān, the Quādi of Calicut. One settlement which he described in considerable detail was that at Elimala, known to him as "Hili", located at the base of a high coastal hill on the northern boundary of Kerala. Elimala, literally "high hill" in Malayalam, was the point at which ships from West Asia usually made their first landfall in southern India.

In his description of Elimala, Ibn Batuta also reinforced his image of Kerala Muslim society as one which shared the international culture of the Muslim Indian Ocean trading settlements, for he described meeting in the village a pious Muslim ascetic from

Zanzibar who had previously lived in Mecca and Medina for fourteen years and was then returning from a trip to China. Yet, despite Ibn Batuta's detailed information about Elimala his portrayal of this settlement and of Kerala Muslim society as a whole was almost certainly one-sided. His reference to poorer Muslims in Elimala gives one hint of the existence of Muslims who had been born in Kerala rather than emigrating there from the commercial and religious centres of Islam in West Asia and who participated only partially in the Arabic culture of those areas. These poor Muslims were probably part of the Kerala Muslim community which had grown through the interconnected processes of intermarriage and conversion, and such individuals must have been present in substantial numbers in Ibn Batuta's time, for they are known to have comprised the majority of the Kerala Muslim population in the first decade of the sixteenth century.

The benevolent Hindu rulers such as the Zamorin of Calicut, the Raja of Cochin were very generous and open hearted in hosting and entertaining the Arabs. They also did everything possible in patronising and promoting the religion of Islam in this part of the world. Unlike many others, these rulers encouraged the spreading of the Islamic religious message and helped in the construction of mosques. In this context, it is significant to note that the first ever mosque was built at Kodungallur in the name of Mālik bin Dīnār with the aid and blessing of Chēraman Perumāl's royal family, the then ruling kingdom of that region.

Duarte Barbosa\(^71\) reported that Kerala Muslims were divided into two distinct groups. One was composed of wealthy, expatriate and largely Arab Muslims who had dominated the international Indian Ocean trade before the Portuguese had arrived. He said that these Muslims, those with whom Ibn Batuta could speak and was most familiar, were known locally as Pardesis, literally "foreigners" in Sanskrit, and distinguished them from other Muslims who lived permanently in Kerala and this stratification known to the Hindu inhabitants as Mappilas. Barbosa made it clear that the Pardesis had previously represented the mercantile elite of the Malabar Coast generally and within the city of Calicut in particular, but reported that most of them had returned to their homes in West

\(^{71}\)Ibid, Also see, Duarte Barbosa's, *The Land of Malabar* (Kottayam: MG University, 2000), p. 72
Asia following the sustained Portuguese onslaught on their shipping. According to him, they had left behind them the much larger population of Mappilas, a genuinely indigenous Muslim community whose members shared many of the cultural characteristics of Hindu castes such as the Nairs. He believed that the Mappilas made up more than twenty percent of the entire Kerala population, by which he presumably meant the area of northern Malabar Coast with which he was most familiar. Barbosa again explained features of the local populace of Malabar as follows:

"... in this land of Malabar there are Moors in great numbers who speak the same tongue as the Heathens of the land, and go naked like the Nairs, but as a token of distinction from the Heathen they wear little round caps on their heads, and long beards and they are so many and so rooted in the soil throughout Malabar that it seems to be they are a fifth part of its people spread over all its kingdoms and provinces."

Barbosa attributed the evolution of Mappila society first, to the fact that "the Heathen if displeased with anything at all become Moors" and second, to the frequency with which Muslims contracted multiple marriages and maintained low caste concubines. For not only the offspring of these marriages recognized as Muslims but the women were frequently converted as well. In reporting that conversion and intermarriage had generated a local Muslim society whose members spoke Malayalam, Duarte Barbosa accurately identified the two aspects of Muslim-Hindu social relations which were largely responsible for the growth of the Muslim population of the area in later centuries. Certainly, merchants and ulamas continued to arrive in Kerala from West Asia, but their numbers decreased dramatically with the arrival Portuguese and the subsequent European trading powers who sought to monopolize the Indian Ocean trade and commerce. Barbosa also remarked upon an important aspect of the conversion process which was conspicuous and apprehensively observed by the British colonial administrators in the nineteenth century. The established members of the Kerala Muslim community enthusiastically welcomed new converts. His recognition that the warm reception of new

---

22For the convenience of manual labour, and due to tropical climate and its unbearable humidity, there is a custom of wearing only dhotis and avoiding shirts, which is still continuing in those parts of the world, such as Kerala, Coromandal, Ceylon, Chittagong etc.
Muslims acted to catalyze the rate of conversions was a perception shared by Zainuddin Makhdūm al Ma'bari, the second major source of information about Islam in Kerala in the sixteenth century.

The most significant non-Hindu people who were next only to the Nairs in political power and influence were the Muslims. They consisted of Arab Settlers and Moplas (Mappilas) of mixed descent. It is reasonable to suppose that as at least after the time of Caliph Omar the trade with Malabar was exclusively in the hands of the Moors. There were powerful Moorish Settlements all over the coast, the most important being at Calicut which was the centre of Moorish trade. The naval forces of the Zamorin were under their command, and it was with their military help that the Zamorin succeeded in vanquishing his rivals. They had a complete monopoly of seaborne trade and their commercial relations extended as far west as Tripoli and Morocco. The political power as well as material prosperity of the Moors gave rise both to neither jealousy nor fear; and everywhere on the coast the Moors were encouraged by the Malabar Rajahs to establish centres of trade.  

The Arab settlers in India were given complete religious and administrative freedom and authority by some Indian rulers. Arab merchants visiting south India and the coastal regions were most cordially welcomed and given facilities for trade and worship. The Arabs and their civilisation created a healthy image of broad-mindedness, harmonious religious coexistence and justice. Many of them married local Hindu women who were converted to Islam. All these factors lead to the massive conversion of Muslim from down South Ponnani to Telicheri. The Arab traders and sailors and the scholars who came along with them had established a cordial, healthy and harmonious relationship without any communal and racial disharmony and distrust for centuries.

The spread of an Islamic society and its faith towards the South-West coast of the Indian sub-continent noticeably associated to the development of the economic forces

---

and its advancement which controlled the subsistence of the West Asian and Central Asian polity of that period. Luxurious living in Rome in the age of the Empire stirred the trade in spices, and the sea routes followed by this trade, through the Red Sea and along the Arabian and Indian coast became a political prize. At least from the earlier centuries of the first millennium BC the Kerala ports seem to have been frequented by merchant ships from Red Sea and Persian Gulf ports in search of spices and other valuable products of Kerala. After the downfall of Rome and the rise of Sassanian Empire in Iran, control of this trade route passed in to the hands of the Sassanians, and when, in the middle of the 7th century, the Muslim Arabs overthrew the Sassanians, they took over the trade in spices and other products of South India, Ceylon, and countries of far east. The city of Basra in southern Iraq in the West Asia and the city of Calicut of Malabar in the South-Western part of the Indian Sub-continent were the major entrepôts of this prolonged maritime trade process. (According to M. Mujeeb, this route was excellent hunting ground for pirates, and it was primarily to ensure the security of the trade route that the Arabs attacked and conquered Sindh in 711-12CE). The rise of Islam in the 7th century C.E gave a great leap to Arab trade with different countries. The consolidation of political authority and establishment of law and order during the Abbasid period (750-1258 CE) stimulated travel and trade. Stephen Frederic Dale observes that “there may well have been Muslims in Kerala almost as soon as Islam had been established in Mecca, since maritime trade between West Asia and India was such a commonplace by the 7th century CE.”

The Arab settlements and their trade centres along the Malabar and Coromandal coasts were under the protection of the then local rulers and kings, because they were enchanting source of profits and prosperity, and no causes of warfare were occurred. Al Masūdi (d.956 HE) recorded that large number Arab merchants settled down in the coastal towns of India, where they were given privileges by the local rulers to administer their own affairs.

---

76 Ibid.
According to S.M. Mohamed Koya, Zamorin employed local Muslims as naval men. As Muslims alone indulged in maritime trade, it is said, the Zamorins encouraged the conversion of his Hindu subjects into Islam. The stone inscription found in the Muccunti Mosque at Kuttichira in Kozhikode throws new light on an interesting aspect of the history of the Zamorins of Calicut and their patronage of Islam in Kerala. This led to the growth of Pudu Islam or New Islam in and around Calicut. With the help of Muslims the Zamorin was able to extend his own sphere of influence. As a reward for their help the Kozhikottu Koya was given the place on the left side of the Zamorin during the ceremonial function of the Mamaka or Mahamagha.

The matrilineal system of inheritance or marumakkattāyam is a peculiar feature of Malabar society and it occurs among a section of Muslims of Malabar. Regarding the origin of the system in Malabar among Muslims there are various theories. One is that the Kolathunad which corresponds roughly to the present North Malabar has its own social system and the subjects who were strictly under its edicts were subject to the system prevailing there. A second theory is that the matrilineal kinship system was adopted by North Malabar Mappilas from the Nair community, probably as a result of intermarriage and conversion. It is supposed that the development of the system may have been associated with the Nair practice of polyandry, helping to ensure that family descent would follow the blood line. In many areas of social life Mappilas have absorbed elements of Kerala culture ranging from dress habits to marriage practices including such customs as tying the tāni, paying dowry to the bridegroom and purification ablutions after birth.

Miller opines that matrilineal affinity is the most important example of Mappila social adaptation. It is something of a cultural assimilation that took place between the two communities: Hindus and Muslims. In the Arakkal royal house, the usual practice followed is that the eldest member in the maternal line, whether male or female, succeeds to the Gadi and many a lady has adorned the royal throne with the title Beebi.

---

79 Tāni: The custom of tying small coin made in gold or silver as part of nuptial on the neck of the bride by the groom during the solemnising of marriage, is practiced by followers all religion in Kerala.
Arakkal 'Swarüpam' (the only Muslim royalty of Kerala), as the Muslim royal lineage is called, is cited as the best example of Muslim matrilineage.

It is noted that the caste system had its effect on the ethnic and religious communities like the Muslims. In the course of the intermingling, both communities, Hindus and Muslims, influenced each other, resulting in a cultural assimilation. The influences of Islam on other religions are also considerable. Peaceful coexistence of heterogeneous religious groups, in its turn, called for, and brought in, a climate of religious tolerance which again facilitated the harmonious growth of Islam. The Islamic principles of equality and brotherhood received a warm reception at the hands of the caste-ridden society of Kerala. The lower caste Hindus found an asylum in Islam which provided them with equal treatment and assured them of equal rights. However, most of the new converts followed their traditions, customs, manner and superstition, a situation which Hindu converts to Islam found most convenient. Some scholars believe that the Adwaita philosophy enunciated by Sree Sankaracharya owes a great deal to Islam with its uncompromising monotheism. According to Tara Chand: "If in the development of Hindu religion in the South, any foreign element is found which makes their appearance after the seventh century and which cannot be accounted for by the natural development of Hinduism itself, they may with much probability be ascribed to the influence of Islam".

In the field of literature, folklore, art and architecture, in particular, and in socio-cultural spheres, in general, Islam has contributed immensely for enriching the cultural treasure of this part of the country. Several terms of trade and commerce of Arabic origin were borrowed by Malayalam directly from Arabic. Thus Malayalam presents a rare spectacle of several words of Arabic origin which are not so well known in other parts of India. One estimate shows that more than 2000 Arabic terms have found their way into Malayalam. These Arabic words, when introduced into Malayalam have undergone considerable changes phonetically and semantically, depending on the phonetical characteristics of Malayalam language. There is still another category of Arabic words used mostly in the religious literature of Mappilas. These words; the preservation of
which was promoted by religious propaganda through literature gained more currency in Mappila songs or Mappila Pāṭtu. The Mailanchi Pāṭtu, Oppana Pāṭtu and the Ammayi Pāṭtu belong to the category of Mappila folk songs dealing with love and marriage and they are sung in chorus in connection with marriage festivals. The Mappila literature is written in a mixture of Arabic and Malayalam language written in Arabic script a characteristic feature which has given the language the name Arabi-Malayalam. A noted Scholar on Arabic Studies, A Ubaid, examines the indigenous writings in Arabic as sources for the study of Kerala history. He cites the very popular Malayalam work Mahattāya Māppila Sāhiya Pāramparyam (1978) by C.N.Ahmad Maulavi and K.K. Mohammed Abdul Karim, one could notice about 222 Muslim scholars of Kerala who wrote history in Arabic, Arabi-Malayalam, Malayalam and English.\(^{80}\)

The Hindu indigenous influence is discernible in the construction of houses. In olden days Mappila houses were built in the ‘Nalukettu’, the typical Hindu Nair tarawad model. The mode of dress as well as food habits followed by Mappilas is patterned by local conditions. The unique style of architecture adopted by Mappilas in their Mosques shows the community integration with Kerala culture and its difference with other Indian Muslims. Mosque architecture of Kerala is noted for its lavish use of wood for construction. Their wooden pulpits contain exquisite carvings.

Another Historian, M.G.S. Narayanan,\(^{81}\) while reaffirming most of the above facts, adds that the Zamorin patronised Muslims to such an extent that he was known as a Moorish chieftain in the West. The trade interests of Kozhikode made the Zamorin a vital link in the chain of Moorish powers from Cordoba in West Europe to Malacca in East Asia. The bonds of loyalty between the Zamorin and the Moors were tightened when they required each other’s help in fighting the Portuguese menace. However, the clever diplomacy of the Portuguese could eventually sow the seeds of mistrust between the two-Hindu and Muslim-communities in North Kerala. He observes that the quick growth of


\(^{81}\)M.G.S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala* (Kerala Historical Society, Trivandrum, 1972), pp. 6-7; See also *Calicut: The City of Truth Revisited* (University of Calicut, 2006)
the Muslim community in wealth and numbers upset the old balance of power in social life. Conflict of interest between Hindus and Muslims became inevitable. Signs of social tension are found reflected in Kerala's medieval folk literature. The Vadakkan Pattukal-Ballads of North Malabar- bear witness to the clashes between the wealthy Muslims of the bazaars and the Hindu aristocratic families. According to Vijayalekshmy M., the Islamic society in Kerala had secular roots. Their primary function was trade and not the propagation of religion. It is to be noted that none of the contemporary literary or epigraphic sources refer to the social tension prevailing in Kerala. This was due to the give and take policy of both the host and the guests. She adds that in spite of this social harmony there developed elements of sectarianism in the society of South Malabar in a later historical epoch as is seen in the Mappila riots of the 19th and early 20th century and in the Malabar rebellion. But the genesis of this antagonism also was not religious but secular.82

1.4 CONCLUSION

The history of Malabar is intertwined with its glorious past of peaceful coexistence and flourishing trade with the tragedies that the region faced because of the trade, economic and religious ambitions of the European powers. Advent of Arabs and Islam to the West Coast of the Indian Sub-continent have immensely contributed to the social, cultural, political and economic fabric of the Malabar. Formation of the Muslim community in Malabar was in a peaceful manner, taking the native communities into confidence. Cooperation and communal amity not confrontation was the corner stone of the Malabar society. However, the following chapter examines how the social and political system in Malabar, in general, and the Muslim community, in particular, suffered due to the onslaught of the European powers.