CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The writing of Local History enriches the life and times of the community of a particular place by providing information related to historical sites and societies.\(^1\) Local history concerns itself with many different subjects within that area; factual events, cultural heritage, genealogy and folklore. All such works provide valuable information of all kinds on historical sites, events, individuals and institutions, cultural practices, worship patterns, folk songs and art forms. The activity of studying and writing local history has received great emphasis in recent times and has reoriented the perspectives of teachers and students and above all, the common people of the respective localities. While there are informed lay persons who write local history as a hobby and even advocate it to be that, there are others who pursue it as a serious work in building up the history of a region or components of it. Good local history is one of the most enduring contributions that can be made to social science. It gives veritable information of all kinds to several sections of population to such an extent that Local History has virtually come to be recognised as instructor to politician, guide to statesman and a school of virtue for all. Further it becomes handy in pursuing unanswered questions of mega history, supplement or complement them, support or contradict their postulates and generalizations;

and so also in the case of metahistory. It is a reservoir of facts and myths which can be subjected to interpretative analysis and further probe.

For centuries people have attempted at preserving and documenting the events of their lives. These collections can serve not only the individual who made them but also the entire community. They focus on people and places. It has been practised in different cultures for different purposes. Local history is the study of regions in the past. The region under study generally tends to be geographically small --- city, town or village. In France and England it grew in the 16th century as a conscious effort out of interest in nobility. In 18th century America, history writings usually portrayed political points of view and stressed a provincial identity. In the case of most of the nations conscious efforts at writing the history of a particular community (local history) dates from the 1840’s. Writers of local history in the 19th century were members of the nascent professional classes whose occupations allowed them time for such an activity. In 20th century local history is a source of entertainment and eventually local pride. In India the cycle of regional studies began with modernization and westernization and it intensified in 20th century by the rise of the nationalist movement. The growing concern with regional issues and aspects also has led to the study of regions. In recent times interest in local history has leaped up with the coming of the decentralized planning.

The history of a local community life can be captured best by tracing the history of its institutions and social relations. In a classificatory and realistic sense, the study falls into, although not exhaustively, the history of the economic, political, religious and social configurations and outcomes that
emerge in the locality. They assume particular significance in the context of societal transformation as very often they act as agents of change. The local scenario is a microcosm of wider trends over time and it has its own significance. The historical time is a concrete and living reality with an irreversible onward rush. Real time is in essence a continuum. It also represents perpetual change. An implication of this is that societal transformation transcends any arbitrarily set chronological bounds. This study, therefore, has refrained from setting any rigid time frame while tracing the historical events and transformation, and the role of various agents or actors in bringing about particular configurations of social relations.

This study is primarily the local history of the ‘Historical Region of Chengannur’ in Kerala, the southernmost State of India. In this an attempt is made to use the available materials with a view to visiting the experiences of the past communities which lived in the region. This encompasses understanding specific issues and gaining knowledge about specific sites. It is expected that the information gathered from public memory, evidences gleaned from material remains, genealogical accounts, studies on urban development, ethnic studies, family histories and the study of multifarious records of institutions such as churches, temples and mosques would help us to trace the life pattern of people of a region and to identify the stages of transformations that have taken place. Temples, churches, mosques and caste and community organizations are, in fact, engaged in social activities which provide services needed by the people.

Like several other fields of studies in the social and literary realms, historical investigations also are the subjects of the purview of several schools of thought and conceptual positions. It may be necessary to make an overview of the various perceptions and positions received in this regard.

Generally the various approaches adopted explicitly or implicitly in historical studies of community life are ethno historical approach, cultural analysis and the different theories and approaches like diffusion theory, evolution theory, ecological approach, structural functioning and approach based on historical particularities. In this study local history approach is used, with a feeling that the local history approach facilitates the coming in of all types of events and influences in the life of a people. In any local context such elements are compellingly present. Nevertheless it will be useful to have an overview here of the various approaches listed above. As local history has already been described earlier the overview is confined to the other approaches.

Ethno historical study is generally conceived as the study of the origin and functioning of human cultures. Ethnology is a genre of anthropological study involving the systematic comparison of the folklore, beliefs and practices of different societies aimed at the reconstruction of human history and the formulation of cultural change. It is usually considered one of the major branches of cultural anthropology. In the 19th century ethnology was historically oriented and it offered explanations for extant cultures, languages

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and races in terms of diffusion, migration and other historical processes. In the 20th century the focus was on the comparative study of past and contemporary cultures. The term culture *literally* means cultivation. It denotes all cultivated practices of people referring to complex aggregate of morals, normative values, conventions, customs, rituals, laws, beliefs, arts and knowledge --- probably all aspects of human life. Many early anthropologists conceived of culture as a collection of traits and studied the diffusion and spread of these traits from one society to another. Critics of ‘diffusions’ however, point out that the theory fails to explain why certain traits spread and others do not. Cultural evolution theory holds that traits have a certain meaning in the context of evolutionary stages and they look for relationships between material culture and social institutions and beliefs. These theorists classify cultures according to their relative degree of social complexity and employ several economic distinctions such as foraging, hunting, farming or industrial societies or political institutions such as (autonomous villages, chiefdoms or state). Critics of this theory argue that the use of evolution as an explanatory metaphor is flawed, because it tends to assume a certain direction of development, with an implicit apex at modern industrial society. Ecological approaches explain the different ways that people live around the world, not in terms of their degree of evolution but rather as distinct adaptations to the variety of environments in which they live. They also demonstrate how ecological factors may lead to cultural change such as the development of technological means to harness environment. Structural functionalists posit society as an integration of institutions (such as family and government) defining culture as a system of normative beliefs that reinforce
social institutions. Some criticize this view, suggesting that societies are naturally stable. Historical particularities look upon each culture as a unique result of its own historical processes. Culture, by predisposition, embraces and resists change depending on culture traits. There are both dynamic influences that encourage acceptance of new things and conservative forces that resist change. Three kinds of influence cause both change and resistance to it — forces at work within a society, contact with other societies and changes in the natural environment. These factors determine the distinctive history of a people and their land. They act and interact for the formation of a particular community and its social relations. Particularities noted in a locality and its societal life at any point of time are evidences left by historical events and processes that happened in its preceding past or even in a bygone era. Specificities of these positions such as economic differentiation, ecological features, structural development of institutions and the particular historical process in a particular region would emerge out of writing its local history done unbiased in any way.

However, in view of the fact that this study is not done under the banner of any particular thought or research approach other than local history it is not the intention to go into the various schools of thought in further detail. The brief sketch of the various lines of thought above was made with the consideration that a familiarity with them would be helpful in noticing the elements in the locality studied. However, no total and exclusive reliance has been made on any particular theory or approach. Nor has any bias been introduced either at the

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stage of investigation or at the stage of writing on account of or in favour of any of these theories. Nevertheless a knowledge of these theories acquired prior to the investigation for collection of historical facts and materials has helped in being alert to notice such specialities as are projected by the theories. So while the attempt has been to collect as much information as are available and possible the prior knowledge of these theories have been helpful in not missing anything on account of ignorance of such aspects. So also no attempt has been made in framing any hypotheses on the basis of the theories. As already pointed out the study is attempting writing the local history which entails certain amount of comprehensiveness which gets denied by the ‘hypotheses testing’ method. Again the study has not depended upon any generalization thrown up by various specific historical studies. For instance, one such generalization that has found place in the historical accounts of medieval Kerala has been the centrality of the institution of temples in the social relations. This study has refrained from foregrounding any such centre. While the power of a discursive approach for selective, concentrated and intensive investigation and interpretation especially for an historical period like the medieval period is appreciated, it is also felt that there is need to study a locality on a wider canvass especially as the study has not set any chronological limits. The search is for information on Chengannur for a vast period from the ancient phase to the modern phase subject to availability. No claim is made here that the study is exhaustive in any respect but at the same time it stretches wider than the single centered approach. The local history of Chengannur as wide as the present one has not taken place so far. This study seeks to fill the gap.
The study is descriptive but cannot be labelled as ‘narrative history’ as it is devoid of rhetoric characteristic of narrative history. Even then it has not followed what is generally termed as ‘scientific approach’. Ideological biases have been eschewed. One of the approaches of study of societies that has found favour among many scholars is the post-modernist approach which is anarchical. This study has not followed any such course. So also there has not been any deliberate attempt at rebuilding history through ‘construction’ and ‘deconstruction’, terms that have found great fascination following Derrida’s works. The approach of this study is simple and straight with the pious hope of capturing the past in its reality as Ranke had hoped for. However, in this effort the study has succeeded only to the extent information is available on them in the present.

Local history cannot be freely set in a vacuum. A locality is an integral part of a mega unit and therefore the history of the locality is, in all likelihood, intertwined with the history of the mega unit. The determination of the institutional and social relations in a locality cannot have a completely isolated history. Therefore while this study is made from a local perspective, the mega history of Kerala has always been kept in mind and brought in at appropriate places. Further the relationship between local history and mega history can be viewed from their usefulness in historical studies. Local history becomes handy in pursuing unanswered questions of mega history, supplement or complement them support or contradict their postulates and generalizations and so also in the case of metahistory. Local history is a fertile soil for rhetoric in history and can be used by those who would like writing history in that manner. Local history is
a reservoir of facts and myths which can be subjected to interpretative analysis and further probe while writing local history of the community life in the institutions and social relations in Chengannur.

The present study gives attention to the folk life and religion that evolved in the historical region of Chengannur through centuries. It examines the various aspects regarding the origin, advent and evolution of cultural traits and their diffusion. The study necessarily includes ecological factors, climate and geographic location which are among the determinants of the evolution of the life pattern of a people and hence of their history. In the case of Chengannur it was staged on the banks of Pampa which contributed to the development of urban characteristics as a populous place and a thriving commercial centre. Chengannur became a commercial centre, where trade networks from port towns and river banks in the west as well as hilly regions in the east operated.

Being part of India and Kerala the history of Chengannur merges with the history of these mega historical units and therefore shares with them several common events and streams of history. In several of the sources mentioned above, there had been persistent presence of historical events of the mega unit of Kerala. However, it is felt that the focus on the mega units and the use of totalizing theories alone are inadequate in capturing the spirit of the historical development at the local level. At the same time the study does not preclude the relevance of these generalities for the study of local history. It may be that very often the findings of the study of local history may supplement the general stream of historical studies, and some of the local phenomena could be explained in terms of or in similar pattern as the mega studies do. However, it is
also possible that some of the information brought out by this study may be outside the reach of the mega inferences and some may even contradict them. It is also possible that some findings may elude any valid inference now or with the present knowledge, but they may offer the base for fresh search and hypothesis formation in future. Wherever possible this study has tried to explain or infer logically on such fresh features alien to the generalities, but where it has not been possible the facts have been presented as they are in the true spirit of historiography.

The writing of local history of Chengannur is significant as it would bring out the details of the history of a region which has to its credit an ancient civilization that evolved on the banks of a sacred river. A very familiar depiction in the books of history of this ancient civilization is that it was one of the 64 Brahmin settlements in Kerala mythologized in the Parasurama legend. It is also considered that Chengannur was among the first 32 Brahmin settlements in Kerala. Another feature of Chengannur commonly mentioned in mega history is its political role during the early phases of the state formation in Kerala. Yet another observation is about the religious eminence it acquired over the years since early times and through the medieval period. The details of these are examined appropriately in the study.

**SOURCES**

The study has tried to incorporate multifarious available information both published and unpublished. These include archaeological, epigraphic and literary information. Archaeological evidences (Megaliths), inscriptions on
stone and copper plates, Government publications, manuals, Gazetteers, Archive records, Settlement Registers, records from revenue and Panchayat offices, Census reports, and Granthavaries of Puliyur, Kandanad and Niranam, travelogues like Jornado of Dom Alexis de Menezes, memoirs, biographies, souvenirs, family histories, and contemporary writings in prose and poetry and interviews with knowledgeable persons were relied upon in writing the history of Chengannur. While these sources are listed an attempt is made to give a very brief idea of what information or what kind of information they provide. In some cases certain details are also given. In the ensuing chapters some of these are repeated as and when required. In some cases they are not repeated but only reference is made to the narration here. The study tapped all available literary, epigraphical and archaeological sources of information on Chengannur besides reports and personal visits, enquiries and interviews. A brief account of the most important sources is given below:

MEGALITHS

Studies on the megaliths of Kerala had begun in the earlier part of the 19th century with the discovery and excavation of few burials at Bungala in the Kannur district in 1823. Megaliths of Chengannur had similarities with those in other regions and belonged to the general burial practices of the inhabitants of those days.

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In Chengannur the megalithic sites are situated 9’0 and 15’0 North latitude and 76’0 and 35’0 East longitude.\(^8\) In the Tholasseri area, north to Chengannur, several antiquarian objects such as foundations of old circular shrines and underground quadrangular houses came to light while digging a pit for a grave in the Christian cemetery. In the hill slope south east to the mission bungalow in Thiruvalla, a small granite cellar containing rusty remains of an iron lamp was found five feet below the ground. In Kadapra, a suburb of Niranam, was found a big granite cellar 20 feet square with a granite covering slab\(^9\). In 1965 during the excavation work for the construction of a new ward for the C.S.I. hospital in Kodukulanji\(^10\) some old burial jars of black and red variety with large slabs over them were unearthed from about 6 feet below the ground. In Pandanad a megalithic burial jar was found 4’ below the ground.\(^11\) The owner of the site Raju Vankarumpil dug the field and found the pot. Following this further exploration was done by the staff of the History Department of St. Thomas College, Kozhencherry. They were successful in piecing together the remains of the jar to its original shape. This jar is preserved in St. Thomas College, Kozhencherry. The place is situated 2kms away from Chengannur. Pandanad is bifurcated and rendered fertile by River Pampa and has its name, according to the belief of the people, derived from Pandavas the epic heroes of ‘Mahabharatha’. According to the local mythological tradition the Pandavas had their stay in this place during their ‘vanavasa’ (exile in the forest). The jar

\(^8\) Census of India, Trivandrum, 1961, p.43.
\(^10\) Ibid.
\(^11\) Mathrubhumi, March, 24,2005,p.3.
measured 2.5X 2 feet in size with an opening of 2 feet radius. The broken pieces of the jar were of the black and red variety. From the Kallissery area some old burial jars were unearthed while digging the ground for the construction of a water reservoir. The local people were the first to encounter the megaliths while digging for laterite and other purposes. The historical relics here were variously called as Pandavanpara, Pandukuzhi and Muniyara. Unearthing of gold objects like ear ornaments from the burials has been reported from Puliyur by Satyamurthi in 1999. The monuments and burials called megaliths are the predominant archaeological remains of Iron Age. During the megalithic period Kerala was almost entirely forested but interspersed by tracts of marshy grass and water logged terrain. The megalithic people subsisted by adapting themselves to these eco systems. It appears that there were numerous small chiefdoms throughout the length and breadth of the region. The presence of megaliths throws up several questions that have found no satisfactory answer as yet. The megaliths are not of much architectural significance but they speak of the custom of the primitive tribes erecting memorials in sites of mortuary rites. These places later became the annual meeting grounds of the tribes and gave rise to occult temples of ancestral worship. These monuments have invariably been found to occur on rocky uncultivable high grounds but in close juxtaposition to a hillock and an irrigation tank and in very close proximity to arable land. This was perhaps the beginning of irrigated rice cultivation in

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12 Eyewitness account by the men of Kallissery.  
14 Ibid.  
South India. This culture is thought to have been introduced by an iron using people some time between 300 B.C. and the middle of 1st century A.D. These monuments represented an expression of relationship with the ancestors thus establishing power and ownership over a specific area of land. Mortuary practices can mirror social status or rank.\textsuperscript{17}

**INSCRIPTIONS**

Inscriptions form authentic sources of information for the writing of early history of Kerala. They furnish valuable material for tracing the dynastic history of various kingdoms and also throw light on the political, social and cultural life of the people in different periods and on privileges granted or enjoyed. They give us an insight into the working of the local assemblies and the arrangements made for the management of temples, the nature of relationship between landlords and tenants.\textsuperscript{18} Several inscriptions relating to Chengannur have been obtained from in and around Chengannur. Three of them have been of particular importance to historians and their significance is discerned below.

*Mampalli Plates of Srivallabhankothai in Kollam Era 149 (974 A.D)*\textsuperscript{19}

This is one of the Venad Inscriptions of the Travancore State. It has been once edited in 1907-1908 in the Epigraphic Indica by T.A.Gopinatha Rao and added with footnotes by the late V.Venkayya. It is the earliest record dated in

\textsuperscript{17} K.K.N.Kurup, *New Dimensions in South India*, University of Calicut, 1996, p.18.
the Kollam Era. This record of 10th century A.D. is incised in Vattezhuthu characters and through a few grantha letters of ‘swasthi’, ‘sree’ and ‘rakshi’. That the inscription is granted to the temple of Thiruchengannur highlights the importance of Chengannur as a supreme centre of religious authority. It speaks of submission of the temple of Ayurur and its landed properties as a ‘Kilidu’ which denotes the Devaswam of one temple being managed by another. It was a symbol of handing over the kingdom of Venad to the attention of Thiruchengannur Poduval who was in charge of Thiruchengannur temple. Mampalli is the name of the ruling family in Chengannur which is also known as Vanjipuzha. It has ties with the ruling family of Travancore.

**Kilimanur Record of Kollam Era 343**

The village of Kilimanur (a pakuthi in Chirayinkizh taluk) with forests, arable lands and compound sites was granted by Sri Vira Adichavarman Tiruvadi who was the ruler of Venadu, for the expenses connected with the feeding of Brahmins and with the annual temple festivals. Of the ten individuals who were elected for the management of the temple affairs Rudran-Sankaran of Vanjipuzha, a Madampi from Chengannur, Damodran-Krishnan of Vilakkilimangalam from Thiruvalla, Vikkirama-Narayanan of Makilanjeri, a Madampi and Satti Vikkraman, Satti of Kamukancheri from Aranmula were some.

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20 Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol;IV, p.5.
Kollur Madham Plates of Kollam Era 364

This is the first copper plate grant of Vira Udaya Marthandavarma. This record further states that while Vira Udaya Marthandavarma was staying at Tiruvanathapuram in company with a certain somayajin a deputation consisting of the members of the assembly of Devidevechuvaram waited on the day of ‘dhanu’ in the Kollam year 364 and represented that at the time of the rule of the Venad king, Sri Vallabhankothai the then queen-mother had been pleased to construct the temple of Devidevechuvaram (Kilimanur). The lands of the temple were granted for temple requirements and the requirements of the Brahmins. The temple of Ayroor and its landed properties were granted by the queen mother of Vallabhankothai to the Thiruchengannur Pothuval. The feeding of Brahmins as an important activity of those times is revealed by this evidence.

Old Syrian Church Inscription in Chengannur

The church does not have any name other than the Old Syrian Church. (In Malayalam ‘Pazhaya Suriani Palli’). The Inscription of the church is found in stone and wood. It is stated in K.E. 845 (matham jnayar 20, Mathuba kallu). Another stone stated in K.E. 850, makara matham 20, Punnuj. In wood there is an inscription ‘Kortheman’; meaning Devi, which could be the name of a deity worshipped by the architect or the carpenter who in all probability were non-Christians. The church in Chengannur is very near from the place where the bazzar owned in earlier times by the Brahmins of the land was located. Local

22 Ibid;Vol;V, p.22.
23 Church Inscription read by M.R.Ragha Varier.
general and traditional customs and practices were followed in the construction of the church as is evidenced by the carvings on the walls and the main door at the entrance. With the arrival of Alexis de Menezes to the church of Chengannur many items which followed the local customs were demolished, the foundation of ‘Mathubha kallu’ was laid, the headstones inscribed and the roof of the church tiled. Until then tile roofing of the church was not done following the objections by the Brahmins of the land.\textsuperscript{24} The various other inscriptions obtained from places around Chengannur which throw light on the historical development of the institutions around Chengannur are enlisted below. It is believed that the church had its origin in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century although the construction of the structures seen today might belong to a later period.

\textit{Inscription of Sthanu Ravi}\textsuperscript{25}

The inscription is in vattezuthu characters. A set of copper plates dated in the fifth regnal year (849A.D. Kollam Era 24.) of King Sthanu Ravi and another undated record, not far removed from the first set, register the royal grants of aristocratic privileges, certain revenue rights and executive powers to Tarisapalli, the Church of the Syrian Christian merchant corporation. Here were also found the Latin translations of certain lost copper-plates, kept in the Vatican, and these may be placed in the same period as the crosses of the Church. These copper plates, six in number, which fell into the hands of the Portuguese in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century were considered lost. But they were recovered by

\textsuperscript{24} Antonio de Gouvea, \textit{Jornado of Dom Alexis de Menezes: A Portuguese Account of 16\textsuperscript{th} Century Malabar}, translated and edited by Pius Malekandathil, L.R.C publications, Cochin, 2004, p. 420.

\textsuperscript{25} Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol. II, P. 61.
Colonel Macaulay and handed over to the Syrian Metropolitan of the time. They remained in his possession till the time of Mathews Mar Athanasius. During the disputes and civil suits between Thomas Mar Athanasius and Dionysius (Marthoma VI) the former produced only four in the court. The remaining plates (the first and last plates) were traced out in the ‘Arama’ (the official residence of Metropolitan at Thiruvalla) of Rev. Mar Titus II Marthoma the Bishop of the St Thomas Syrians of Malabar, Thiruvalla. Incidentally Mar Dionysius was buried in the Puthenkavu Orthodox Syrian Church. It was not to Sabir Iso but to the Quilon church built by him that the Quilon plates were given by Ayyan Adikal the King of Quilon.26 The copper plates indicate the existence of a Christian community before the arrival of the Syrian settlers in Kerala.

**Inscription of Kollam 278 (A.D.1103)**27

The inscription is a version of early system of governance prevailed in Kerala. It indicates that a Brahmin theocratic government which functioned in Kerala was not suitable to discharge its functions and hence came the rule of Kerala under ‘Rakshapurushas’ (Protectors) elected for three year periods from the four villages of Panniyur, Paravur, Perumchellur and Chengannur. They, known as four ‘Kazhakams’ also presented an unsatisfactory rule and became corrupt. As a result viceroys who were designated as ‘Perumals’ were empowered to rule and provide protection. Each Perumal was to rule for a period of 12 years. The seat of the ‘Perumal’ was Cranganur (Kodungalloor or

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Muziris of ancient times). Around and close to the place were situated the ‘Thalies’, the assemblies of the representatives of the Brahmin aristocracy who elected the Perumals. These ‘Thalies’ represented the four divisions into which the country was divided for administrative purposes. These ‘Thalies’ were known as Melthali, Kilthali, Chingapurathuthali and Netiyathali. The Brahmins who were reputed to have held sway in Malabar previous to ‘Perumals’, had established four Kazhakams, the headquarters of each of which was located in a temple of fame within the representative Kazhakam. These temples were the venues where the Brahmin inhabitants of the locality met to deliberate on affairs of local importance, the representatives of the Kazhakams met in a general assembly at the capital to assist the Perumals. The duty of electing the rulers was left to these four Kazhakams. The ‘Thalies’ of the ‘Perumals’ were but the continuation of the Brahmin Kazhakams and the Brahmins preserved and strengthened themselves powerful enough to control the affairs of the Perumals.  

*Inscription from Thiruvanvandur*  

Thiruvanvandur, a village in Chengannur Taluk known by the name of Thiruvanmandur and Tiruvanvandur in inscriptions is one of the thirteen holy places of Malanadu praised by Nammalvar, the Vaishnava saint. The Vishnu temple of Thiruvanvandur of great antiquity flourished from the period of Nammalvar who lived around the beginning of the 9th century. The

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epigraphical evidence registers a gift of some land by Ediran Kaviran of Kurattikadu in Tiruvalla taluk for the maintenance of the lamp in the Vishnu temple at Tiruvanvandur. The protection of the ‘three hundred of Nanthuzhinad’ (comprising Chengannur) were entrusted with the general supervision of the Raja of Odanad later known as the kingdom of Kayamkulam.

**Inscription of Sattankulangara**

This inscription is engraved at the entrance into the temple at Sattankulangara, a suburb of Chengannur. It is written in Malayalam using Vattezhuthu alphabets. It has no date but may be attributed to the 14th century A.D. The inscription gives a list of donations of money given by a number of individuals for feeding the Brahmins and a list of names of houses and lands situated near around the temple.

**Inscription in the Valiapalli Church at Kottayam**

This inscription is described in ‘Pallippattu’ (songs relating to churches). It is stated that Kanayi Thomman (Thomas of Cana) along with 72 families of Christians got on board a ship from the country of Evuz and arrived at Kodungallur (Cranganore). He obtained a copper plate charter and then entered Kaduthuruthi, proceeded to Kottayam situated in Thekkumkuru and established a church in Kollam Era 725. C.B.Firth reports of a social distinction among the Knaya Syrian Christians between those intermarried with Indians and those who did not. The former are called Northists (Vadakumbhagar) and the latter are

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called Southists (Thekkumbhagar). The latter regarded themselves as the direct descendants of Thomas of Cana. From Kottyam they migrated to Kallissery in Chengannur and reached as far as Ranni and a few other remote interior villages like Pavukkara in Chengannur Taluk.

_Tiruvellannur Record_\(^{23}\)

This inscription is incised on thin leaves and relates to the accounts of the temple for the period 600-900 Kollam Era. The language and script of the record is Malayalam. Elayadathu swarupam or Kizhperur royal house was the seat of Venad during this period and consisted of small chieftaincies of Vadakkumkur, Thekkumkur, Panthalam, Elayidam, Kollam, Ambalapuzha, Edappalli etc. which functioned as independent units spread all over Venad. Marthandavarma who acceded to the throne of Travancore (Kollam Era 904-933) by dint of successful wars and diplomacy managed to annex these chieftaincies to his dominion. Chengannur was located in between Vadakkumkur and Thekkumkur.

**GRANTHAVARIES**

Granthavaries record the daily social life of the people of Kerala, social relations, economic transactions, trade relations, the ideas existed at that time, treaties, organizations, customs, rituals and chronology. Three Granthavaries which were sources of information useful to this study were the Puliyur Granthavari, Kandanad Granthavari and Niranam Granthavari.

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\(^{32}\) C.B.Firth, _An Introduction to Church History_, p.29.

\(^{33}\) _Travancore Archaeological Series_, p.48.


**Puliyur Granthavari**

It contained 27 documents confirming the authority of the Thevar of Puliyur (Chieftain of the land) who had enough kara lands. The document gives the income from the lands and expenditure for ‘rakshabogham’ (daily expenses). This document affirms the royal superiority of the land and the landlord who met the expenses through agricultural operations.

**Kandanad Granthavari**

It contained 1577 pages. Rev. Fr. Joseph Cheeran brought to light these documents. The documents of Karottuveetil Samuel Mar Divanos (1826-1886) were included in it. The Granthavari deals with the history of Malankara church before the arrival of Portuguese and Marthoma VI. Further it discusses in detail the history of Malankara church upto 1829.

**Niranam Granthavari**

It explains the role of indigenous Christians from 1770 to 1885 in establishing churches in and around Chengannur. It highlights their daily accounts, legends, history, autocracy and traditions. It contains 179 documents. Among them 83 olas are related to the sufferings of Marthoma VI as the head of the Marthoma Syrians, 19 olas give history of the Christians, 35 deal with the orders of Church Vikars, 15 with miscellaneous Ramban songs and 27 olas with Niranam pattukal. It is clear from these documents that St.Thomas Christians enjoyed several rights and privileges. Niranam was the centre of their Diocese.

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where the bishops were staying and administering their activities. The next important centre is Chengannur where many of the bishops and Kathanars received recognition as the priests of the Syrian church. Puthenkavu church was built while Mar Evanous Metropolitha was staying in the Pallimalika of Chengannur.

**LITERATURE**

*Traditional Literature:* Several traditional literary works are connected with Chengannur in one way or other. *Unnuneelisandesam*\(^{36}\) the celebrated ‘sandesakavyam’ (message poem) mentions the role of Nantuzhainad comprised of Thiruvalla, Chengannur, Chenganacherry region, one of the subordinate divisions of the second Chera period, merged in course of time in the kingdom of Odanad and later in Thekkumkur. It also speaks of ‘Panayannar Kavu’ and Alamthuruthy. According to Brahmin tradition Saktibhadra\(^{37}\) who was the author of the celebrated Sanskrit drama *Aschariyachudamani* of 9th.c.A.D. was a Brahmin of Chengannur grama. Though this book is based on Sanskrit work it is noted for its originality of treatment and richness of ideas.\(^{38}\) Mahakavi Chekizhar wrote *Periyapuram* or *Thiruthondaipuranam* a very noble Dravidian epic in Tamil where he describes Malanadu as ‘Parachuramanuperunadu’ and Chengannur as ‘Cherarthirunattoor Kalimpoonpiranthamoolar Chenkantoor’. He describes Chengannur as the most prosperous and oldest Ur among the Urs of the kingdom of Cheras. Nammalvar

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\(^{38}\) Ibid, p.44.
of the first millennium A.D. the exponent of *Thiruvaimozhi*, described six divya kshetras around Chengannur. These temples are Thiruchittatinkara, Thirupuliyoor, Thiruvanvandur, Thiruaranmula, Thiruvallavazh, and Thirukkodithanam. Lord Vishnu of Thiruchittatinkara is also named as Imayaramappan. He describes Chengannur as Chenkunnur as a town where the smoke emanating from ‘Yajna’ the Vedic ritual, fills the sky and as a place surrounded by lush vegetation. In one of the dialogues in Chilapathikaram, goddess Lakshmi calls Chengannur as Chenkamalai. In this respect there was a controversy between Mahakavi Ulloor and Kalloor Narayana Pilla. Kalloor maintained that the ‘Chenkuntur’ mentioned in ‘Chilapathikaram’ is Chengannur and in that way Chengannur becomes relevant in the life of Kannaki the heroine of Chilapathikaram. However, Ulloor differed arguing that geographically it was more probable that Kannaki could reach Chengamanadu near Kodungalloor more easily than Chengannoor and therefore the reference is to Chengamanadu. Kalloor held that geographically it was easier for Kannaki to reach Chengannur than Chengamanadu. Further, he argued that if ‘Thiruchenkuntur’ in the ancient ‘Nalayiram Prabandham, could be Chengannur and when Chekizhar wrote the history of Viralmind Nayanar in the Dravidian literary work ‘Periya Puranam’ he described him as Cheran Thirunattoor Kalinmum Pirantha Moolar Chenkuntur. Therefore he argues that Chenkuntur in Chilapathikaram in all probability is Chengannur itself.

The Dravidian literature has inscribed the role Chengannur played over the ages past depicting it as a sacred place which attracted people from far off
places as a religious centre. To them it was a refuge, and a much relied source of blessings.

A Thekkan Pattu

One of the Thekkan Pattukal (Southern ballads) known as Chengannur Kunjathi 39 is a heroic epic of the ‘Parayas’, a caste which later in the hierarchical caste system that developed in Kerala under the Brahmanical supremacy became a low caste. These songs about Chengannur Kunjathi are the heroic anthems circulated among the ‘Parayas’ of Central Travancore.40 Songs about twenty one Atimar and Eighteen Kalarikar were sung around. Chengannur Kunjathi or Chengannurathi was one among these Atimar. Chengannurati was a victorious warrior who fought and defeated the twentyone masters in the eighteen kalaris.

Dalit Sahithyam40* of Kaviyur Murali, a store of knowledge on the ‘Natan Pattukal’ (folk songs) of different Dalit communities has made a detailed commentary on the folk song on ‘Kunjathi.’

OTHER LITERATURE

Sthalapuranas

Mahakshetragalude Munpil (In Front of Great Temples) Authored by Nalamkal Krishna Pilla glorifies the role of temples in shaping the history of the land. It includes the temples of Chengannur as well. The temples were

40 Mariamma John (1919-2008) popularly known as Mariamma Chetathi who rose from the ranks of the toiling people has authored a book ‘Manikkam Pennu’ which is a collection of folk songs native to Central Travancore. This collection contains the ballads on Chengannur Kunjathi.
important centres of political, economic, spiritual, social and cultural development of the people. When Kerala was divided into petty principalities and kingdoms, these temples had important role in regenerating the people of Kerala as one entity. Geographically, culturally and historically the unique art forms of Kerala evolved during her long history as a separate entity.

**Thulasiharam Authored by Aswathy Thirunal Thampuratti (2001)** is a treasure of knowledge about divyakshetras (holiest temples) of Thiruvithamkode (Travancore) a kingdom that extended from Kanyakumari in the South to Paravur in the North. “It lay between Arabian Sea in the west and Sahyadri range in the east. The Pancha Pandava Vaishnava temples in and around Chengannur are included in the 32 divya kshetras described in Thulasiharam.” This work recounts the role played by the royal authority in extending to all Hindus, irrespective of caste, the facility of the worship inside the temple by issuing the Temple Entry Proclamation in 1936. Until then only the upper caste Hindus enjoyed this right and the entry by all others were rigidly prohibited. The reform added vigour to the preservation and maintenance of temples all over Travancore.*

**Chengannur Kshetramahatmyam Authored by Kalloor Narayana Pilla (1911)** deals with the history of the land based mainly on the ‘granthhavaries’

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40* Kaviyur Murali, Dalithsahtiyam, Kottayam, 2001, p.2.  
* Note: It may be noted here that in Travancore the steps for renovation and preservation of worship places started and happened in a major way under the efforts of Colonel Munro who was Diwan in Travancore (1810 – 1814) during the regency of Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bai. In fact he rescued many temples which were withering away.  
42 Kalloor Narayana Pilla, Chengannur Kshetramahatmyam, Devaswom Board Publications, Trivandrum,1911,p.10.
available in Chengannur temple and, to a lesser extent, on several Tamil works like Chilapathikaram, Periyapuranam and also Krishnapuram court records. According to the temple granthavaries the temple was installed by a Chera Chakravarthty. It is further stated in the granthavaries that among the 63 generous men of Nayanars, Viralminda Nayanar was born and brought up in Chengannur Angadical Mathilakam. Kalloor’s temple history is more than history; it enables understanding the topography of the land and customs and practices of the land of Tiruchengannur. In the whole of Malanadu (Kerala) Chenkunnur alone is blessed with five Pandava temples. However, a controversy existed between Kalloor Narayana Pilla and Mahakavi Ulloor in respect of the reference to Chengannur in ThiruChengannur Kshetramahatmyam. The book also gives a glimpse of this controversy.

*Keraleeyagramangalilude (Through the Villages of Kerala)* Authored by Kattakada Divakaran identifies ‘grama’ (village) of Kerala as a treasure house of knowledge. The place Chengannur as a grama consisted of seven Village Panchayats. He describes villages as abodes of cultivation. They give man the experience of close touch with nature and contribute to rich farming all around. The Gramam according to him is rich in natural beauty and fertile fields.

**BIOGRAPHIES**

*Thachil Mathoo Tharakan* Authored by M.O. Joseph is relied upon to have a perception of the development of trade and commercial sector in Central Travancore of which Chengannur was an integral part. Its caste and religious
asides and folk arts are also obtained from this life history of Mathoo Tharakan. He was a leading 18th century trader of Travancore who started export trade in Alappuzha. This was his greatest achievement. He was a Varthakapramani (business magnet) who played a prominent role in the affairs of Kerala, particularly Travancore. From very early times many vanikas (traders) became wealthy through trade. The items of trade were pepper, arecanut, cinnamon, turmeric, ginger, timber etc. They collected these items at a low rate and transported them to ports and other sales destinations. Ports such as Kodungallur and Kochi were the earlier centres of trade. But with the dawn of 18th century Alapuzha attained prominence as a trade centre, an accomplishment achieved through the efforts of Diwan Raja Kesava Das of Travancore and Thachil Mathoo Tharakan who worked in unison and great friendship. During this period Mathoo Tharakan contributed heavily to the state treasury. He bought the durable and hard teak wood of unique quality in the Ranni Reserve Forest, at that time under the control of Vanjipuzha Chief of Chengannur, and transported it through River Pampa and sold it to the East India Company. This teak wood was used for the construction of ships in England. Its unique quality and cheap and abundant supply held the secret of the growing naval power of England. This Nazarani (Christian) trader Thachil Mathoo Tharakan was given the title Tharakan by Maharaja Karthika Thirunal Bala Ramavarma (Dharmaraja who ascended the throne of Travancore as successor to King MarthandaVarma who unified Travancore as a single

Kingdom). Tharakan contributed to the progress of trade and the development of Travancore state and state treasury. He was honoured with Virasringhal by the King. He was considered as banker to the state and in the difficult and critical time when Tipu attacked Travancore Mathoo Taharakan supplied enough money to the state treasury, thus helping avert the turn of history otherwise would have happened. Thachil Mathoo Tharakan acted as a mediator when the rift took place between Puthenkuru and Pazhayakuru churches (Catholics and Orthodox). He supplied money and raw materials mainly wood for the construction of the Puthenkuru Church in Puthenkavu in our study region. The canal to this day known as ‘Kuthiathodu’ an infrastructure that promoted traffic of goods between Alappuzha port and interior Central Travancore was dug at his initiative and with his finance. However, he had a miserable period later in life and a sad end.

T.M.Varghese Authored by E.M.Kovoor⁴⁵ One of the trios who led the agitation against Sir C.P Ramaswamy Iyer in the cause of responsible government in Travancore was T.M.Varghese. The other two leaders were C.Kesavan and Pattom Thanupilla. He was elected for the first time to the Assembly from Pathanamthitta in 1937. The result was announced from Chengannur Taluk Kachery. He got 6672 votes and the opposing candidate got 4688 votes. He attained many attractive positions in the Assembly. Finally he became the Deputy Speaker. He was the first person to agitate for responsible government in the Assembly and against the ‘American Model Government’ for

⁴⁵ E.M.Kovoor, T.M.Varghese, Kottayam,1965,P.64.
Travancore as expounded by C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer. This was in 1938. He was arrested and jailed several times. In June 1938 an independent meeting of the State Congress was held in Chengannur near the Government Hospital Junction. The Mills Maithan and the neighbouring streets were filled with men and police. This gathering was a turning point in the history of responsible government in Travancore. It witnessed the martyrdom of a boy and the event came to be remembered as the *Mills Maithan Sambhavam* (*Mills Maithan Event*).

**TRAVELOGUES**

_Jornada of Dom Alexis de Menezes: A Portuguese Account of the Sixteenth Century Malabar:_ This is the translation of a Portuguese work written by Antonio de Gouvea in 1603 published from Coimbra in 1606. It is a useful original source material for the study of the social, economic, religious and cultural history of medieval Kerala. Some political references are also available in the book. Jornado literally means journey. It is an account of the chain of visits made by Alexis de Menezes to the various churches and settlements of the St. Thomas Christians in Malabar in 1599 which he undertook presumably with a view to Europeanising and Latinizing native Christian community of India by erasing all their indigenous customs and practices. It is believed that during his journey he destroyed many ancient records of St. Thomas Christians kept in various churches. The Archbishop reached Chengannur after visiting Niranam. Chengannur is described as the main strength of idolatry of the whole Malabar

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and it is reported as a big bazaar with many rich people. His report evidences the fact that Malabar is just like Europe where lands and cities belonged to religious organizations --- in Europe churches and monasteries, and in Malabar mainly temples. Chengannur is one of the places owned by the temples which are described as most sumptuous in size, wealth and very high and proud structures covered with copper and many notable things. However, in terms of wealth it is given a status below that of the nearby Thiruvalla.

_Sabarimala, Sholayar, Moonnar 1977_, Authored by V.V.K Valiath:47 This is a travelogue reminiscing the natural beauty of these places. He describes Sabarimala as a paradise of greenery. There we get perfection of real beauty, the fountain head of all inspiration. A book on Sabarimala is used for this study as historically Chengannur had established certain abiding links with the place and the temple. These are brought out in this study on Chengannur in the various chapters. Lt. B.S.Ward who conducted geological survey of Sabarimala in 1818 describes the settlement as old as 4000 years. The earliest mention of Sabari is in the epic story of Ramayana. Accordingly Lord Rama and his brother Lakshmana who were wandering in search of Sita were received by a Sanyasini called Sabari. River Pampa mentioned in Ramayana originates from near Sabarimala. One of the regions of the five Tinas of Sangam literature is called Mullai. The place name Mullaperiyar near Sabarimala seems to retain a reference to this historical fact. Many Dravidian temples existed in the Sahya mountain ranges during the time when Tholkapiyam, the famous Tamil work

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was composed. Mr. Ward records what he found in some of these temples during his visit. The human settlement and deforestation of the later periods totally destroyed the remnants of historic India. This part of Western Ghats projecting into the sea was called Malai Mountain; it is so mentioned in Arthasastra of Kautilya. During the ‘Sangam’ period (the first few centuries of Christian era) either this hill or its surrounding was known as Pothiyilmala which at one time was the seat of the Ay Chieftains.

*Varthamanapusthakam or Romayatra (Journey to Rome) Authored by Fr. Thomas Paremmakkal:* This is an important work which focuses on the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala.¹ and is a travelogue. The St. Thomas Christians of Kerala had no connection with any churches outside Kerala for a very long time in the early phase. Christians everywhere had an independent status. However, in A.D. 313. Emperor Constantine declared the Roman Empire as a Christian centre of dominance. With the extension of Roman Empire to Constantinople, there began the struggle between the Roman churches and the churches of patriarch of Constantinople. These latter churches resented the efforts for establishing the authority of the Roman Churches over them. The Persian traders who had come to Kerala too were in the forefront of this resistance. Christian churches in Kerala had no connection with Rome and the liturgy used in them was not in conformity with Roman liturgy either in content or language. Persian traders received many facilities from the emperors of Kerala as are seen from the inscriptions in the copper plates given by the rulers of the times. These

include mainly Kanai Thoma Cheppeod, and Tarisaipally Cheppeod. Persian Bishops visited the churches of Kerala and established an ecclesiastical authority over them. Kariyatti Malpan, Fr. Thomas Paremmakkal, Kuttanad Mathew Kathanar, and Chacko Kathanar were some of the twentytwo Kathanars (priests) of the Romayatra Sangham (group who journeyed to Rome). These twentytwo Kathanars had several aims of which the main was to seek a Bishop for the Diocese at Kodungallur. They had also to deal with the issue of preserving the freedom of the Syrian Christians of Kerala and their diocese without yielding to the yoke of the foreign missionaries and to seek conciliatory measures in this respect. The journey started in May 1778 and the group returned in May 1786. They stayed in Rome for five months. The Portuguese Queen appointed Kariyattil Malpan as the Metropolitan of Kodungallur. After the death of Kariyattil Malpan Fr. Thomas Paremmakkal became the Governadar. He died in 1799. The book gives valuable insights into certain phases in the history of the Christian Community in Kerala.

*Keralacharithraveekshanam* Authored by P.A. Syed Muhammad: The book examines the writings of foreign travellers on the history of Kerala.48 The writings of Pliny, Ptolemy, Fahian, Hiuen Tsang and Megasthenes give valuable information about the Romans, Arabs and Chinese who entered Kerala from very ancient times itself. The discovery of Hippalus, the wind, in 45A.D. contributed a fresh boon to the trade relations. Romans started direct trade with India while the Arabs and the Chinese continued to trade with Kerala with

added vigour and competitive spirits. The acridity of pepper attracted the
foreigners to Kerala. The appearance of place names such as Opher, Panthareeva, Tyndis, Nedris, Tharshis, Bacre, Karavura, Koreara, Pawdare, Paravura, Kottanara and Kappouva in the writings of foreigners owes to their
long standing trade communications with Kerala.

_Sancharikalum Charithrakaranmarum_ Authored by Velayudhan Panikkassery:

The work provides information regarding foreign travellers who visited Kerala from time to time and their writings. This information is briefly examined below. The first European who gives information on Kollam Town is Rabi Benjamin. Pliny, Ptolemy and the unknown author of Periplus were the travellers in the first century A.D. Cosmos Indicaplieustus visited Keralam in the 6th Century A.D. His impression about Kollam is very interesting. Sulaiman visited Kerala in 851 A.D., Marcopolo in 13th century and Ibn Batuta in 14th Century.

When _Rabi Benjamin_ visited Kollam in 1165 A.D. he was welcomed by the Venad ruler Aditya Varma with Arunooottuvar Koottam (Force of 600). He described the men of the land as trustworthy. The people were sun worshippers. The people of the land did not bury their dead. Instead the dead were seated on the chair and dried with spices smeared upon them. When the ship was anchored at the shore three agents of the crown entered the ship for checking after which clearance was given. They took a list of the export items and of the men on board the ship. On its basis reports were made to the crown.

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Shores where the ship anchored were not the real suppliers of pepper; the interior places were the real centres of pepper cultivation.

Kollam was famous for the spices ginger, cinnamon, pepper and the like. Five years after Malik Kafur’s invasion upon Vijaya Nagar took place in 1336. Malik Kafur attacked Nilakal in the eastern parts of Travancore in 1341.

Governance of Travancore [and of Cochin also at a later point of time] had come under the direct control of Diwan Col. Munro. He was Diwan in Travancore for the period 1811-1814 during the regency of Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bai. He pioneered several reforms such as decentralization of governmental authority. Devaswom was also brought under the control of the Government. Unauthorized revenues were strictly forbidden. A department of accounts was created for the proper record of accounts. Judiciary was formulated and the crimes reported were strictly punished by the rule of law. The army was restructured. New industries, railway, trade and market centres were established. In the high range, plantations such as Harrisons and Botleboys were organized. Tile, coir and cashew industries were organized. C.M.S. and L.M.S. missionaries started educational activities, a process which eventually facilitated formal education of lower castes who were denied that right vehemently by the upper castes. Engineering section and Medical Department were started. Vaccination against small pox was introduced. From 1860 onwards wages were paid in cash instead of wages in kind. In 1812 slavery as an institution was stopped. In 1855 it was completely abolished. Improvement in agriculture through better methods of cultivation and vocational training courses led to the
development of a sizable section of the community free from the yoke of Janmis.

**Descriptions by Durate Barbosa:** Nairs and Ezhavas used calx made of cowdung. Cow was considered a sacred animal and the materials from cow also were considered sacred. All the rulers of Kerala were Hindus and idol worshippers. People had both fair and black complexions. Nobody used attire above the waist. Below the waist they used costly white dress. Sometimes they used silk dress also. On some special occasions, they used red coloured silky dress or cloth of galloon or ornamentally woven dress as well as a front opening full jacket. Hair was curled on the forehead. Chin was cleared but moustache was grown; ear rings were used. Finger rings were made of costly pearls. Occasionally they used to wear dress and pasted three lines clay upon waist, chest, forehead and neck. They took morning bath and worshipped their deity before they started their daily activities.

**Descriptions by Ludovico D Varthema:** These speak about the houses of the Keralites, rulers and naduvazhis who had long houses thatched with palm leaves. Roofs were not high. The houses had no ceiling. Rice was the staple food of the people who were strict in eating rice grown in their own ‘vayal’ (paddy field). They cooked in earthen pots and drank in earthen vessels. While eating they sat almost close to the floor using a small wooden plank (The reference must be to ‘Korandi’ a properly shaped wooden plank which was very common in Kerala until a few decades ago. Even now they are not totally absent). He also recorded that Kerala was rich in backwaters, lakes and rivers. To travel through these rivers, lakes and backwaters was interesting. It gave him
the feeling of heaven on earth. He was impressed by the scenic charm of Kerala with forests and also plantations full of coconut, teak wood, sandal wood, rose wood, pepper etc. In fact the entire flora and fauna of Kerala attracted his admiration.

**Niehoff Memoirs:** Niehoff was a Dutch captain and he visited Kayamkulam from where he moved on to the Dutch warehouse (Pandakasala) at Kollam. He was enamoured by the natural beauty of Kerala. He has described in detail his journeys. He visited Kayamkulam (then capital of the Kingdom of Kayamkulam to which belonged a large part of Chengannur) from where he moved to Purakkad and met the King of Chempakassery. He used vanchi (canoes) for his travel. The power of Chempakasseri Raja lay in his small and swift boats. His naval power consisted of 500 soldiers. The rivers and water expanses of Kuttanad abounded with small boats and this presented a most interesting sight to Niehoff. Chempakasseri Raja extended to the Dutch all facilities for the pepper trade when the Dutch Captain met him in 1642. Niehoff also recorded that there was a gramam (village) of St. Thomas Christians who enjoyed several rights and privileges granted to them by Chempakasseri Raja.

**Writings of Barthalomadaix:** He has recorded the details of Onam which was celebrated for eight consecutive days. This festival is celebrated by all the people of the land.

**Writings of Cladius Buchanan:** Slave system and slave trade were his main recordings about Kerala. Slaves worked on the vayal (paddy field). These slaves were fully owned by the Janmis of the land. They had no right to move without the intention of their landlord. The Lord of the land had the right to sell
and buy them whenever and wherever he liked. Slaves were mainly Cherumar, Pulayas, Parayas, Kanikar, Ulladar etc. Even as they constituted the stock of slaves their customs differed from caste to caste. They lived in small huts with very little space inside. When agricultural operations were on they had to stay in the fields for doing the operations such as harvesting and threshing. They stayed near the pond for cultivation.

**HISTORICAL PUBLICATIONS**

*Kerala Charithrathinte Iruadanja Edukal Authored by Elamkulam Kunjan Pilla:* By the middle of the 20th century a change in the historiographical outlook in Kerala was brought about by the commendable works of Elamkulam Kunjan Pilla who analysed the socio-economic problems of medieval and modern Kerala. He analysed the period of Aryan influx of seventh and eighth centuries which revolutionized the then society and culture. The period from 9th to 13th century is characterized as the period of temple centric Brahmin settlements. The book cited the role of ‘salais’ (educational institutions) and the management of temples by ‘uralar sabha.’ He also pointed out that the Kizhperur Swarupam and Thripal Kadal Khsetram under which Venad was governed was managed by Nampoothiri illoms of Iranikulam, Vavakadu, Muzhikalam, Kuttampally, Irinjalakuda, Varnakode, Vanjipuzha Chief of Chengannur, Vilakkilimangalam of Thiruvalla, Kamukanchery and Makizhanchery of Aranmula the last three ‘illoms’ were in the historical region of Chengannur.

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**History of Kerala Authored by K.P.Padmanabha Menon:** Written in the form of notes on Visschers’s letters from Malabar is a connected, complete and authoritative work useful for the study of local history. This book has been relied upon for several aspects relating to the history of Kerala and the regions.

**Brahmin Settlements in Kerala Authored by Kesavan Veluthat:** The book deals with the role of the Aryans in transforming Indian Society. The term Aryan is applied to the groups of people who came originally from North India with the Sanskrit language and Sanskritic ways of life. Although they included traders, Chiefs, and missionaries of outdoor sects like Jainism and Buddhism. Chengannur located between River Churni and Cape Comerin was one of the Brahmin Settlements in Kerala.

**Kerala Temple and the Early Medieval Agrarian System Authored by Rajan Gurukkal:** The work holds that the temples studded the major agrarian localities of Kerala by 9th century A.D. The seat of the temple of contemporary Kerala formed part of the sacred geography of the bhakthi hymnists of South India. The bhakthi movement of Alwar and Nayanar was fundamentally connected with the expansion of brahmanical localities. The hymns were sung in praise of the deities of the temple. The bhakthi hymnist Nammalvar sung at, Thiruchengannur, Tiruvanvandoor, and Tiruaranmula, Trikkari and Tiruvettar. Of these the first three are in and around today’s Chengannur town region.

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**Keralathinte Innalekal Authored by K.N. Ganesh:** This book deals with the supremacy established by the ‘Naduvazhis.’ The title literally denotes one who reigns a nadu (Region). Naduvazhis were regional rulers. Trade served the interests of the ‘Naduvazhis’ and the temples. The encouragement given by foreign tradesmen was a reflection on the financial needs of the Naduvazhis. Following the break up of the ‘gothra’ society (clan based society) very many social sections established supremacy. Following the formation of the ‘thara’ or ‘Kara’ organizations non-Brahmin landlords came to power. From 15th century onwards they began to manage all the activities like cultivation, tax collection, keeping accounts etc. Vanjipuzha Chief, King of Poonjar and King of Kollamkod were some of these Naduvazhis. The Vanjipuzha chief of Chengannur owned land as far as Thiruvananthapuram.

**Cultural Symbiosis Authored by M G S Narayanan:** This study reveals that in ancient Kerala there was peaceful co-existence of different communities. Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam co-existed peacefully. As a result a multi cultured society has been woven through the centuries with Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian and Islamic elements coexisting without losing their identity.

**Madhyakala Keralam: Sambath, Samuham, Samskaram Authored by M.R. Raghava Varier:** The work examines the elements that attracted foreign traders to Kerala. Spices, textiles, arecanut, coconut and various medicinal herbs

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were traded to the west through Arabs and to the East through Chinese ships in the 13th century. Trade in copper, tin and mercury suggests the presence of an industry based on bronze. This industry was so technically developed that it was recognized internationally. It was quite a major fete that a product like Aranmula Kannadi (Aranmula mirror) was made by melting copper and tin in particular proportion and making a mirror from it by polishing it well. Aranmula is a village in the proximity of Chengannur town.

*Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of 1500-1663 Authored by Pius Malekandathil:* The book describes St. Thomas Christians as the major cultivators of pepper in Kerala. Portuguese documents reveal that pepper was cultivated by the native Christians. The centres of Christian settlements became specialized regions of pepper cultivation. He also states that the three tier land system (proprietor or janmi, pattakkaran and kutiyan) was the consequence of the Aryanisation of the region and links it to the control over land established by the Nampoothiri Brahmins between 9th and 12th centuries. He also gives an account of the network of land routes through which commodities from hinterland to the port of Cochin were transported. The River Pampa originating from Sabarimala hills enabled linking Chengannur to the domain of Thekkumkur.

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57 Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and Maritime Trade of India 1500-1663*, Delhi, 2001, P.47.
OTHER HISTORICAL WORKS

These include the following works: Burton Stein, *Essays on South India*; Kanakalatha Mukund, *Trading World of Tamil Merchant*; Ranabir Chakravarti, *Trade and Traders in Early Indian Society*; R.Champakalakshmi *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization in South India* and Kenneth R Hall *Trade and State Craft in the Age of Cholas*. The works use temple models which are useful in understanding the structure and composition of past societies of South India. Their models are useful for elaborating the trade networks of the region. In addition, the various souvenirs and publications of organizations including those of political parties have been valuable sources of information.

INTERVIEWS

*Acharya Narendra Bhooshan*: Acharya Narendra Bhooshan is a Vedic scholar and virtually a store of knowledge on the past of Chengannur. Several sessions of discussion with him helped in knowing and searching the past of Chengannur. He holds different but scholarly views and interpretations on many things including folk and religious practices.\(^58\) His specific views on Chengannur have been incorporated in various chapters.

*Dr.P.K.Koshy*: Dr.Koshy is an aged Agricultural Scientist. He gave the following information. Sasthampuram market in Chengannur is famous for the

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\(^{58}\) For instance, he holds that the story of Mahabali and Vamana is a Vedic narration relating to Astronomy. He cites Yaska’s ‘Niruktha’ where Vamana is narrated as rising sun. The word Vamana means vomiting. The night vomited the sun in the form of Vamana, a small boy. Mahabali represents earth. The two steps in the legend which Vamana makes on the head of Mahabali denote the two steps of morning to noon and noon to evening. The Vamana (sun) can make only these two steps on earth. The version goes on to further explain the timing of Onam in the month of Sravana.C.f.Acharya Narendra Bhooshan, *Rig Veda Mandalam,6, Sukta, Verse,17*, N.B.Press,Chengannur,2000,P.12.
supply of seed materials. People from distant lands used to come here to collect seed materials. Chengannur is mainly a laterite area except for the river bed. There is a mixture of clayey soil, alluvial soil, and sandy soil. Several agricultural products come from homestead gardens. The households store the durable products to meet their own consumption requirements till the next harvest and then either sell the surplus to the vendors who visit them or transport it to the market. They used to cultivate varieties of banana, sweet potato and seasonal crops alternated with sugarcane. The rotation of crops is practised in order to avoid pest and diseases. Crop rotation is made on the basis of the soil. River beds are flooded every year leaving rich organic material enabling flourishing vegetable cultivation in them. Rice is not a major crop here although in some of the low lying areas it is cultivated once in an year to a limited extent. However, these fields too are, at an alarming rate, converted to dwelling places and also used for brick making.

Interviews were held with several other persons who were either actively involved in some of the historical events or had witnessed them or lived in those times. These relate mainly to the periods of the freedom movement, trade union activities and cultural aspects. Details of some of the religious issues or events were also collected by interviewing connected people or knowledgeable people in this respect. Their names are given appropriately as and when the aspects are discussed in the various chapters.

However, the information on the saga of the pre–independence agitations in Chengannur obtained in an interview with the old couple
Shri Tikku Varghese and Smt. Ammini Varghese, Thompil, Thittamel, Chengannur who lived through those days of turmoil is given below:

To defeat the policies of the autocratic Diwan of Travancore Sir C.P Ramaswamy Ayyar, shortly known as Sir C.P. or C.P., the people of Chengannur used the tactic of cutting the government trees and using them for blocking the road. This was the usual method adopted to prevent the royal traffic through roads as a gesture of protest. The police of C.P. was mockingly called ‘Ara police’ because of the half trousers of its uniform. The police did doing great harm to the people of Chengannur. Once 500 men were taken into custody and sued. A famous marching song of the people of Chengannur during their agitations against C.P. was as follows:

Enthaanamme Vanchi Mathave Ninte Santhapakaranam? Santhannagalkku enthu bhavichu? Sundaramam ninte bhavanam onnu puthanakkiduvan jeevan vechu pokam namukku; Poojyanmarum Punnyavanmarum ennu Poojapura thannu koottilakapettu? Kessillathe lathikkadicha yuva kesarimarude kayamellam raktham chinthi; Karagrahathil kidannu namukkai kannirozhukunna prathakkale; pinchu kumarakanmarude nenchora nenchalivillathe varnneduthu; Nishkrupaya Sadhujanangale thokku kondu konnodukki.

The substance of the above is as follows: “Oh! Vanchi Matha\textsuperscript{59} (Mother land) ! What is the reason for your sorrow? What happened to your children? To renew your beautiful home let us go ready to sacrifice our lives; When were the

\textsuperscript{59} The reference is to Travancore which was also known as Vanchi Nadu.
honoured and the great locked up in the cages of Poojapura? Without any case against them, the brave youth suffered the lathi blows bleeding all their bodies. In the jail they weep for us. Heartlessly blood was drained of their hearts; mercilessly the meek were gunned down.”

THE CHAPTER SCHEME

There are seven chapters in the thesis:

The first chapter is “Introduction”. To recall, it includes a discussion of the nature and relevance of local history, the region selected and its importance and relevance, specification of the objects of the study, the approach and methodology of the study, the sources of the study and the chapter scheme. The sources of information need an elaboration here. The study has tried to incorporate all available multifarious data, both published and unpublished and obtained through interviews of knowledgeable persons. They are recapitulated below: archaeological evidences (Megalithics), inscriptions on stone and copper plates, government publications, manuals, Gazatteers, Archive Records, Settlement Registers, Records from Revenue and Panchayat Offices, Census Reports, Granthavaries of Puliyur, Kandanad and Niranam, Travelogues like Jornado of Dom Alexis de Menezes, Memoirs, biographies, family histories, souvenirs and contemporary writings (both prose and poetry) and personal interviews.

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60 The reference is to the Central jail in Poojapura, Trivandrum where the freedom fighters were kept in custody.
The **second chapter** entitled “Land and People” gives the details of the land and the people. It contains the geography of the land.

The **third Chapter** deals with “the Political Past”. It starts from the Sangam age and traces through the medieval periods of principalities and finally to the formation of the Travancore State. The long history under Travancore State and its legislative bodies had its final phase before independence in the agitations of the people for rights and against the idea of independent Travancore, besides the freedom struggle itself. The specific involvement of Chengannur and its individuals in this long period is brought out through this chapter. A brief outline of some critical developments during the pre–independent and post-independent political situations is incorporated in the study.

The **fourth chapter** is “Historical Perspective of the Economy ”. Chengannur did have a role in the economic life of the erstwhile Travancore under certain configurations that characterized it. This chapter endeavours to bring out this configuration, besides tracing the glaring features of Chengannur economy today.

The **fifth chapter** deals with the “Religious Institutions” and examines the role of these institutions in the history of the community life in Chengannur. The religious institutions comprise a recognized body of communications who gather together regularly for worship accepting a set of religious doctrines.

Religion often codifies behaviour. Fidelity to a belief is a must for the members of a religious group. It is like a knot in which are intertwined a lot of
divergent characteristics of the structure and mentality of a society. These in fact determine the role of a religion operating in a locality.

Chengannur has been a religious centre. Hinduism, Christianity and Islam are the main religions here. In terms of population and institution the Islamic religion is limited in this region, their agglomeration limited to a few places. So the availability of information was mainly on the two sets of religious institutions belonging to the Hindus and Christians.

The sixth chapter is on the “Social Milieu”. The chapter gives the history of social institutions in the region and the cultural scene (art, education, science and journalism) and individual contributions and achievements in this area. Social institution refers to a group of social positions connected by social relations and performing a social role. It can be defined as any institution in a society that works to socialize the groups or people in it. The social function of the institution is executed by the fulfilment of roles. It implies a major and fundamental orientation of the system of institutions so as to play the respective roles, and to influence, lead and even control a society. This chapter examines the organization of the society in terms of caste or community divisions and its impact, particularly its negative impact. The distinctive pattern of the ‘Chathurvarnya’ that took shape in Kerala and in the locality as well is brought out. It also takes note of the absence of the ‘Vaisya’ caste within the Hindu fold and filling of this role by traders of the other communities.

The seventh chapter is “Summary Observations”. It brings together the emerging picture of Chengannur in its long drawn evolution through a traceable history of over 2000 years although with varying degrees of vividness. That
unfolding is admittedly not exhaustive in this study which is the first of its kind to make such an elaborate study of the past of Chengannur. The chapter is not only a summing up of the previous chapters; the prominent points emerging from the previous chapters are brought together and therefore the exercise of drawing any over all inference and the discussion for it is done here. The attempt to draw inferences also seeks to identify some of the seemingly critical factors that portend good for the future journey of this region with a long track of historical importance. The entire information brought out is offered as a stock of history and is open to any further analysis and interpretation.