CHAPTER 4

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE ECONOMY

The attempt in this chapter is to obtain a historical perspective of the economy of Chengannur over a time. The exercise is not necessarily what an economist would perceive of the economic changes in terms of statistical quantitative analysis, but is in the nature of an historian’s sensing of the economic life of a people over a period of civilizational evolution.

The chapter has two parts conceptually unrelated to each other in any explicit or obvious way. Further they are accounts of the economy at different temporal points. The first part examines the broad contours of the socio-economic evolution in Chengannur as part of Kerala and South India. In this the slant is more to the economic aspects that are socially bound. Some of the social features which did have economic significance like the labour and caste emancipation are dealt with either in the chapter on the Social Milieu or in the chapter on Political Past and may not be found in this chapter. The second part consists of observations on the economic activities in Chengannur of recent times and is intended to be a bench-mark information of the current phase which could be compared with situations in the past and perhaps of a later time. This part also would enable identifying the growth potentialities of Chengannur. Some features which have economic significance which are discussed elsewhere in the study may not be present in this chapter. In fact in the Chapter on Land and People there are such features which bear economic significance.
Our knowledge of the economy of Chengannur in the early centuries of the Christian era is very limited in the absence of any concrete direct evidences. One can only rely on the models attributed to Kerala and perhaps South India, although several regional variations restrict implicit total adaptation.

With its undulating landscape the different portions of the ‘Historical Region of Chengannur’ may be inferred to have belonged to one or the other ‘thinai’ divisions ascribed to the ‘Tamilakam’ of the first few centuries A.D.. Economic activities are location suited and location specific in this scheme of things. These activities were featured by primitive forms especially with respect to their organization and techniques. The accounts on this period give a picture of a sort of institutionalization of predatory gift based redistribution. Exchange economy was limited and whenever it occurred exchange took place in barter terms and the two commodities of exchange historians have recognized are paddy and salt. Some exception to this had been brought about by foreign trade rendering ‘gold’ which came from outside, a sort of ‘social money’. Gold acquired this role besides its importance as an item of ‘social consumption’.

Apart from the undulating landscape certain other geographical aspects also had been critical in deciding the economic life of the ‘Historical Region of Chengannur’. Chengannur was proximate to the ancient port of Niranam, and the later period port of Purakkad. Right from early times Chengannur had the distinction of a place located on the trade route from port towns in the west to the eastern hilly tracts where the spices and the forest produces came from. Over the years the geographical configurations changed following the
geological events like earthquake and landslides. Rivers changed their courses and navigability at different points of time. All these geological and geographical events had their impact on the way Chengannur grew as an important economic entity in the past.

Shift in the infrastructural facilities also affected the relative economic position of Chengannur. The rivers around the region viz. Achenkovil and Pampa were waterways that facilitated cheap and easy transport to the town Alapuzha which developed as a port in the 19th century A.D.. To and fro traffic of goods between Aleppey as well as the western interior and the eastern hinder lands and hilly tracts upto Nilakal took place through these waterways. Wind-driven country boats were used for this purpose. The products from the east came to Puthenkavu on the banks of River Pampa either as head loads or on bullock carts or by boats. Goods that came by the land route were transferred to the country boats for onward transport. The boats carrying goods either from the east or from the west by the river could not proceed beyond Athikkayam off Puthenkavu where the river was deceptive and difficult to navigate. At that spot it became a regular practice of shifting the goods on head loads or bullock carts and taking them to a safe river point where they were shifted to the boats for onward traffic. The development of Alapuzha port made this actively hectic in this ancient trade route and thereby paved the way for the development of the town of Chengannur and its market streets.

However Aleppey lost its importance as a port when the port of Kochi grew. Eventually the above trade route became less busy. Since the water ways
reach upto Kochi some cargo traffic using this facility did take place between the new port and Chengannur.

A magic change occurred when the road transport and still later the railways came eliminating or marginalizing the waterways. In fact much more than anything else these were the principal changes that altered the relative position of Chengannur as a trading centre. The fact that other nearby townships also came up and had their role as trade centres also contributed to the relative decline of Chengannur.

The water abundance and soil fertility the rivers brought to the region contributed to the growth of agriculture in this region. Perhaps it is as a riverbed (the ‘Historical Region of Chengannur’ benefits from three rivers viz. Pampa, Achenkovilar and Manimalayar) that Chengannur had attracted the historical event of a massive Brahminical settlement. The local expression revealing the magnitude of this settlement of Brahmins is “Akathu Moovayiram; Purathu Moovayiram” meaning “3000 inside; 3000 outside.” This event led, in course of time, to the evolution of a civilization characterized by a sort of ‘feudal’\(^1\) agrarian economy and society and the growth of a temple town which expanded the scope of trade as well. Prof. Elamkulam Kunjan Pilla\(^2\) included Thiruvanvandur temple located in Chengannur among the temples he cited as examples of growth of temple centres of both Vaishnavites and Saivites.

\(^1\) The word ‘feudal’ is used in the absence of a better container in line with what is generally adopted to refer to the type of societies that developed in the medieval period although it has been held widely that the system that emerged here was different from the system that developed in Europe. Nor there is any intention to compare or contrast the situation with what Marx termed as the ‘Asiatic Mode of Production’, nor to contextualise it in the frame works that started with Kosambi for India as a whole.

from very early times. The above process which started from 8th century onwards has been common to several river-beds in Kerala. A new phase of life in Kerala emerged and grew over the years since the “influx of the Brahmins”, accompanied by a new institutional economic order which became part of a determining set of factors and a framework itself of the social and economic life of every set of people. The event had ramifications for the organisation and techniques of production, the level of output and surplus, impact on the volume of trade and the general progress of the economy apart from the socio-economic impact on the ownership of the means of production and the redistribution of the surplus. The very socio-economic structure itself got transformed.

Historians have been inclined to draw certain general patterns for the so-called ‘feudal’ agrarian societies that grew in Kerala and South India after the Brahmanical settlement took place. The Brahmins who settled in fertile lands with assured water supply succeeded in organizing an agrarian village economy of which they placed themselves as the heads. They were uncultivating chiefs of the agrarian system to which they nevertheless brought the impact of their relatively superior skills and managerial capability. The basic unit of the agrarian order was village economy based on peasant agriculture integrated into local regional units called ‘nadu’ as Burton Stein described it. Two integrative institutions were functioning: (i) The Brahmadeyas or the Brahmin villages established through land grants mainly to Brahmins and (ii) the temple which emerged owner of extensive tracts of agricultural lands. In Kerala as is well known the corresponding terms were ‘Brahmaswom’ and ‘Devaswom’ lands. In the former case lands belonged to the Brahmins and in the latter case the lands
belonged to the temples. Brahmins got land through land grants, gifts to the temples, and forsaking by the land owning castes like the Pulayas under various forces like oppressive tax burden, penalties and faith led gifts to temples.

Over the years with the added element of hereditary rights a caste system got evolved in Kerala. Brahmins with a number of status divisions within it, headed the hierarchy of castes and sub castes and this caste system determined the hereditary occupational pattern. Ownership of land was not confined to Brahmins alone. Another set of people who had ownership of land was constituted by the Christians and in later times by several other caste Hindus like Nairs who received land grants for one or the other reason. Christians owned agricultural land from the very early times. Some of the Christian families were recipients of land grants as are evidenced by the copper plates. They were also granted to enjoy a number of other rights including the services attached and slave labour. A detailed account of how Christians got land is given in Chapter Six on the social milieu.

Within the purview of ‘Brahmaswom’ and ‘Devaswom’ fold also land rights, either on tenurial status or on ownership status, were accruing from time to time to non Brahmin communities within the Hindu community. These are well known stories. Chengannur too had passed through these formations in the agricultural sector during its long history of civilizational evolution before it underwent the pre-independence and the post independence struggles, tribulations and transformations.

Following the revival in Hinduism and the Bhakti movement temple construction was undertaken on a large scale from 8th century onwards by the
ruling classes especially the royal families including queens and princes. As
temple complexes became larger they also became the nuclei for urban centres.
Endowment of land and money created the need for developing organizational
structures to manage the resources.

According to Nilakanta Sastri the temple was not just a religious
institution. Its role in the economic sphere underlines this view. As the number
and size of temples increased their importance in the economy as land owners,
employers and consumers grew. The temple also became a depository for
resources which were endowments for the performance of religious services. Of
greater significance to trade were the donations of money or gold received from
the people who were in turn borrowed by individuals, local bodies or merchant
associations for various activities. The interest paid to the temple was used to
maintain the service for which the endowment was made. The spread of temples
and ‘Brahmadeyas’ (Brahmaswoms) resulted in the expansion of urban centres
The above patterns of urban growth must also be linked with the growth of trade
and commercial organizations. They were trade guilds which traded in Kerala.
The ‘manigramam’ was a localized merchant body while the ‘Anjuvannam’ was
an association of itinerant merchants and was supra regional in character. A
view is that ‘Anjuvannam’ was an association of foreign merchants first
established in west coast which subsequently moved to the east coast ports.

According to Dr. Burnel and others Anjuvannam referred to the colony of the
Jews and Manigramam to that of the Christians. One of the salient features in

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3 Kanakalatha Mukund, Trading World of Tamil Merchant, p.49.
4 Ibid
5 R. Champakalakshmi, Trade Ideology and Urbanization in South India, p.17.
the industrial life was the growing importance of guilds. Almost all industrial activities and major professions were organized under their respective guilds.

In the general context of India large number of epigraphic documents and literary sources like Jatakas, Apadanäs, Milindipanha, Manusmrithi, Yajnavalkyasmrithi, Mahabharatha throw valuable light on the co-operative character of these organizations and also on the guild laws. An eloquent testimony to the expanding scope of activities of guild is seen in the functions of guilds as banks. These guild organisations were entrusted with the task of collecting and distributing the produced items. In Chengannur agricultural production was conducted on a large scale and stored in earthen pots. A major part of it was stored in wooden houses and marketed during festive occasions including the anniversary day of temples and churches.

In Chengannur for a very long time the trading scene was occupied fully by the Christians except probably in Mannar where the Muslims are a prominent part of the trade sector. The Brahmins who came to Kerala did not bring with them any trading class nor were they promoting any such group from within the group of community over which they had hold. The absence in Kerala of a Vaisya class in the ‘Chathurvarnya’ which grew here in course of time has been noted by historians. The Brahmins were also averse to crossing the sea. They confined to the temple, farming and their role in the political dispensation. The role of ‘trade’ was filled in by other communities. In Kerala this role was fulfilled mainly by Christians, Muslims and the Jews. Some of the

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historical persons of trade were Mar Sapir Iso and Mathoo Tharakan. It was already stated that in Chengannur Christians constituted the trading community. Several of the ancient Christian families also reside here now are descendents of traders of a distant past.

The proliferation of crafts was equally matched by a trade boom from the first century B.C. onwards. The vast subcontinent provided a market large enough for the consumption of growing agricultural and industrial commodities. But the most significant aspect of commercial activities of this period is the brisk participation of India in long distance international exchange net work both over land and sea particularly with the Roman empire. The Periplus, Ptolemy’s geography, Pliny’s natural history and Strabo’s geography unequivocally refer to the very prosperous and brisk Indo-Roman trade in early times. Pliny discusses the gradual development of the sea-routes in four stages, the latest and most developed phase of which brought a ship from red sea port to Muziris in the Chera country. He recognized the convenient port to load goods at that time as Bacra supposed to be Purakkad near river Baris identified as Pampa.

Copper, tin, mercury and such materials as camphor and Chinese pottery were indispensable items of import to Kerala in the Chinese ships. In the description of Marcopolo the main trade product of the Chinese ships in the 13th century was copper. Apart from making of vessels of copper, the presence of copper, tin and mercury suggest the presence in Kerala of an industry based

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on bronze. This industry was so technically developed that it got wide recognition all over the world. In ancient days a rare and unique product like Aranmula mirror was made by melting together copper and tin in a particular proportion and by polishing it. This was accomplished in Chengannur. Aranmula the place where it is made is only 6 kms. away from the town of Chengannur. Moreover the Utensils, worship vessels, bells and cymbals used in the temples of Kerala in those early days were all made with alloys of copper and tin. Bell metal products of Mannar are famous and much demanded.

‘Moosaries’ (artisans who mould out metal especially bronze) in and around Chengannur are famous in making alloys of copper. Thattavila Ayyappa Panicker the famous ‘moosary’ from the region was given free land government as remuneration for making the idols of the temples. The Ayyappa vigraha at Sabarimala was made by him.

Copper vessels were so common that they were found in the houses of common people. Copper plates were used in large quantities for covering roofs of temples. Copper and bronze were in great demand in Kerala that their trade was a natural and essential concomitant. In a sense the rural society was a combination of agriculture and handicrafts. The ‘moosaries’ who set idols in certain temples were given land as remuneration. Some of them who were not skilled did the work of filling holes of vessels. Some very talented members of the sections were busy with producing luxury items for trade outside Kerala. Certain others used to take up the profession as just ordinary routine employment.

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9 However, according to anecdotes available he was very much disappointed by the meagre reward he received from the Vanjipuzha Chief for carving the idol at Sabarimala.
Part II

Agriculture and connected employment form the main source of livelihood of the people of present Chengannur. At the same time the region is influenced by changes in the income through remittances particularly that from abroad. The development of the non-farm sector is slender. In the initial years of the gulf boom a large chunk of the money so generated was spent unproductively in such activities as construction of unduly large luxury residential buildings which in many cases remained unused. Another considerable portion of this money is invested in private financial enterprises who charge exorbitant interest from its borrowers and so could offer the depositors a relatively higher interest.

The development of the agricultural sector of Chengannur owes it to the heroic struggles of farmers and farm labourers. The once flourished agricultural sector is now facing a phase of stagnation.\footnote{Chengannur Block Panchayat Vikasana Rekha, Chengannur, 2002-2007, p.12.} For quite some time the farmers have been struggling under the pressure of fall in the prices of paddy and coconut and the ever increasing cost of production. Land filling and conversion of paddy fields for other purposes, mostly nonfarm uses like dwelling places, shops and brick clins also constitute serious problems. The main products in this region, apart from paddy, are coconut and tapioca. The recent shift to cash crops like rubber and coco has caused considerable diminution in food production. Diseases like root wilt for which no effective remedy is available threaten the very survival of the cultivation of coconut.
Until recently sugarcane was a main crop grown on the banks of the rivers. The winding up of Mannam Sugar Mill at Panthalam and the stagnation and even deterioration of the nearby Pampa Sugar Factory at Pulikkeezh (in Tiruvalla Taluk) has reduced sugarcane cultivation to a meagre. It is almost totally absent in places like Venmony, Budhanur and Mannar regions where it flourished once. In certain parts of Thiruvanvandoor and Pandanad panchayats sugarcane is cultivated now but it is mostly used for making jaggery by the farmers themselves.

The advent of sericulture and active interest evinced in it by the farmers herald a major shift in the crop mix of the region.

Of late farmers have shown interest in cattle rearing though they are slightly upset by the increase in the cost of production. A solution suggested is intensive activity spread of the dairy development agencies and channelling the efforts of the farmers to the co-operative fold.

The scope for development of inland fish farming in this area is also recognized. Sizable employment opportunities can be created in this sector by scientific planning and management. It calls for the active participation of government agencies and the involvement of the people.

The industrial sector has remained backward in Chengannur. The Prabhumaram Mills in Mulakuzha panchayat has been declining and unless government takes special interest and introduces timely development projects it will soon become a sick industry. The Cheriyanadu Co-operative Power loom

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12 Chengannur Vikasana Rekha, p.37.
Mill is now functioning without any proper management. The Co-operative Society for handloom also is not working. Many such co-operative units are there which can be revived if effective measures for it are taken without any further delay. The Mannar Switch Gear Factory is slowly moving towards sick conditions. Among the small scale village industries the metal industry in Mannar and the brick industry in Budhanur have been functioning profitably. The pottery industrial units of Kallissery and Puntala exist only in name sake.

The traditional bamboo based handicrafts like mat making present an undeveloped condition. Hand weaving industry in Perigarapuram, Ulunthi gramam and some areas of Mulakuzha panchayat is totally neglected now and need timely improvements with government aid. The cashew factory established in Mulakuzha is providing employment to a large number of women.

The rural life presented by the farmers and farm labourers mould the culture of Chengannur. The warmth of such a culture is evident in the human relations of the people here. Active development in the educational field came even before independence. The contributions of Christian missionaries, the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangam, and the Nair Service Society have been pioneering and significant. One trend to be noted on the educational front is the increasing craze for English medium schools. This phenomenon poses a big threat to the Malayalam medium aided schools. The problem can be solved by increasing the basic amenities in the government aided schools, improving the educational standard and by the introduction in aided schools of intensive

\footnote{Chengannur Vikasana Rekha, p.42.}
coaching in English right from the first standard. There is a demand by the people for establishing new technical schools. One suggestion is to elevate the Ennakkad U.P School as a technical high school.

The eastern part of Chengannur consisting of Mulakuzha, Venmony and Ala is generally hilly with some plains here and there. Earlier there was plenty of paddy cultivation, in this area. The soil here is suitable for all crops. Paddy is cultivated in about 3850 hectares and coconut in about 4550 hectares. Vegetables, plantain, yam, colossi, tapioca, pepper, ginger, turmeric, clove and nutmeg are also cultivated mostly as intercrops in the coconut groves. The unbearable increase in the cost of paddy cultivation, the low returns, the dearth of farm labourers and the several risks have affected paddy cultivation adversely. Following the conversion of paddy lands for cultivating cash crops like rubber, coco and coconut or for dwelling purposes or for commercial purposes like brick making are on the increase. Rubber is cultivated in about 9875 hectares. Mainly small scale farmers are engaged in rubber cultivation.

However, for ensuring food security by adequate domestic production of paddy effective steps are needed. This would entail sufficient incentives to the farmers so as to enable them remain in paddy cultivation. Marginal and medium farmers used to depend on coconut cultivation for livelihood. But this sector is also on the decline. Production has decreased considerably. The main reasons are root wilt and diseases caused by various pests as also depletion of the soil fertility. Soil testing is not effective and soil is not properly conserved. Now the main crops cultivated in dry lands are tapioca and plantain. The interest to cultivate pepper and cashew is on the decline due to several hazards faced in
their cultivation especially the high cost of production. Betel leaves are cultivated in Mulakuzha, Venmony, Ala and Cherianad panchayats on a small scale. Venmony and Mulakuzha Panchayats encouraged vegetable cultivation and achieved considerable success in this respect. Seri culture activities have picked up in Puliyr. Cultivation of interim crops in paddy fields for supplementing the income of the farmers is a felt need. At present interim crops are not sufficiently and regularly cultivated by the farmers.

The activities of the Krishi Bhavan are not fruitful. There is great scope for restructuring its functioning with popular participation. Farming does not attract the young people these days. A new agricultural culture is yet to be seen anywhere. The Krishi bhavan and the co-operative movement have yet to make their presence felt in providing the leadership in promoting such a new turn although they are the agencies potentially capable of doing it. The absence of proper marketing facility has led to the exit of sugarcane cultivation. Animal husbandry is a key sector in rural development. It provides sizable employment opportunities and financial gain for rural women. Animals constitute income generating wealth of the farmers. Milk production is considered as a secondary employment by the crop farmers. To some it offers main employment opportunity as well, although it requires adequate external financing. However, the financial institutions do not co-operate well with those who want to enter the animal husbandry field. The requirement of eggs and meat is not met by present level of internal production. Yet this sector has not made any significant development. It is so despite the presence of a modern hatchery in Chengannur. Various measures have been introduced by the efforts of the Panchayat to bring
about progress in this field. Awareness camp is one of the important steps in this direction.

Fishing, mostly found in Pandanad, Puliyur, Budhanur and Mannar panchayats, provides sizable employment opportunities. In Mulakuzha, Cheriyanadu and Venmony panchayts some sections of the people have their livelihood by fishing. Women play a significant role in the sale of the fish caught by the men. Fresh water fish farming has been relatively of recent origin and is a growing sector. The canals, the traditional and the new ponds and the rivers provide the venues for fish farming. One of the adverse effects of several new practices followed in crop cultivation and fish catching is that several traditional fish species of preference on the dining table have reduced in number and some are on the verge of extinction. A glaring example is that of the fresh water large prawns. No perceptible effort has been noticed in drawing comprehensive plans for rearing these species which, in addition to the saving of the species, would generate employment opportunities considerably. With sufficient fresh water base in the rivers, ponds, canals and waterlogged areas fresh water fishing can be developed in the region through proper planning of schemes, training programmes, cooperativization and microfinancing. Poomalachal in Ala, Thamarachal in Puliyur and other such places in Venmony are suitable areas for promoting fish farming, tourism, and irrigation.

The felt need voiced by the people for elevating the Ennakkad U.P.School as a technical high school assumes significance. Chengannur taluk

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14 Chengannur Vikasana Rekha, p.42.
is industrially very backward. There are many educated unemployed including technically qualified persons in Chengannur who with some assistance and training can become either skilled employees or self employed entrepreneurs.

Only Mannar panchayat has developed in the industrial field at least to a small extent. Sixty five small and large industrial units work here. The most important industry is Alind Switch Gear Factory, but it is on the verge of closure. Bronze metal industry controls the economy of Mannar. 3500 workers are employed in this field. The Praburam Spinning Mills in Mulakuzha panchayat functions under Kerala State Textile Corporation. 272 people are employed in this enterprise. Another small scale industry of this area is brick making. About 7000 people are employed in it. Traditional brick making is almost extinct. Wire cut brick making units with high modern technical methods have almost displaced the traditional units.

Other traditional industries are on the path of gradual decline.\textsuperscript{15} The non-availability of adequate bamboo and its high price discouraged the production of household items made of bamboo such as kutta, vatti, and panambu (baskets and mats). Marketing facilities are also rare. Handloom weaving was very common sometime ago in Cheriyanadu, Puliyur and Budhanur panchayats providing employment to a large number of people especially women and therefore there is need for reactivating the industry. Pottery work is a source of employment in Kallissery of Thiruvanvandoor panchayat but it also is in crisis. A recent development which deserves attention is the advent of self help

\textsuperscript{15} Chengannur Vikasana Rekha, p.41.
societies which have potentialities of solving unemployment among the economically backward women to a great extent. This relates particularly to the activities of self help units which produce curry powder, achar, chips, and milk products. They have come up in almost all panchayats. The powerloom unit in Cheriyanadu panchayat which used to provide employment to 60 people directly and 40 people indirectly is not functioning now. This co-operative society owns 20 cents of land, building and powerloom. The women industry units started in Puliyur also do not function. These sick industries wait to be reactivated. The cashew factory in Mulakuzha has contributed to reducing the unemployment among women of the locality to a certain extent. There are many employment seekers in this area who have successfully completed training from industrial training centres. They have very little opportunities. Although electronic industry has emerged as a major sector that can absorb the educated youth, conscious efforts are lacking in the region to impart the needed training to them on a wide scale and in providing encouragement and assistance. Another requirement is providing technical training for starting self employment enterprises. Industries based on agricultural crops, coconut and rubber have very high potential. Another employment avenue of this area is cattle rearing. But a crisis is created by the high price of cattle feed, low price of milk and the absence of units which make milk products. The region has a rich raw material base for providing cheap, high quality cattle feed.

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16 Ibid, p.36.
The Central Hatchery located at Chengannur was the focal point of the poultry activities of Kerala and to a certain extent of the whole of India. The part played by the Central Hatchery in transforming poultry rearing into a large scale industry of very high investment which generate large scale employment opportunities and which transform qualitatively the dietary pattern of the people. Until its coming poultry was an activity limited to the backyards of households. The hatchery had its beginning as a small poultry farm under the Kerala Animal Husbandry Department in 1961 in a 10 acre plot by the side of the M C Road, 2 kms. south of Chengannur. Over the years it grew to impressive proportions. One by one, the following enterprises were added to its fold: a hatchery for chicks, a feed and production factory, a workshop to make equipments, a chick sexing school to train people in identifying the sex of chicks, a testing lab to check the quality of the feed, a training institute for various veterinary subjects and skills and finally a quail farm.

However, the hatchery faced crisis after its functioning for two decades. An egg marketing scheme for distribution of eggs to the military, civil establishments and the public market and a research scheme (breeding programme for the introduction of new breeds of poultry) were introduced at the national level in the 1980s. As the neighbouring states entered the poultry breeding scheme, making heavy investment both in private and public enterprises, their eggs, meat and feed flooded the market at very low rates which

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17 Central Hatchery Souvenir, p.1.
18 Central Hatchery Souvenir, p.4.
were less than even the production cost in Kerala. In the stiff competition that ensued and due to the scarcity and high price of major raw materials, the Central Hatchery was not able to survive. Hopes, however, revived. Now the Central Hatchery is making a come back by overcoming the crisis. In 2001 a joint venture of the Central and State Governments with an estimate of Rs. 45 lakhs was sanctioned to the unit. The same year a scheme to rear poultry for Pattanakad block in Alappuzha at an estimated investment of Rs. 20 lakhs was entrusted with the Central Hatchery by the government.

The hatchery ensures the availability of quality young chicks by hatching cross bred egg laying chicks suited for the home yards, and by entrusting the government approved nurseries the task of supervising them. The Central Hatchery provides egg laying chicks for the chick distribution projects by the local development project.

The activities are as follows:

Poultry Farm Hatchery: Thousands of productive eggs provided by the high yielding parent stock supplied by the established quality breeding farms of India are hatched in the incubators and cross bred chicks are produced. This establishment is capable of hatching 5, 60,000 chicks at a time. They are distributed on every Tuesday and Friday.

Chick Sexing School: Training is given here to identify the sex of one day old chicks. This is an area with large employment opportunities. The course of five
months’ duration has enabled many young people to get employment in India and abroad. 19

Feed Production Factory: This unit aims at the production of high quality feed at a low cost. Provision is made to produce 30 tonnes of feed every day.

Feed Testing Laboratory: Testing the quality of raw materials used for chick feed and of feeds produced in other government farms are the envisaged tasks of this unit. It has the potential to be transformed into an authority capable of certifying, for the public, the quality of various cattle and chick feed available in the market.

Workshop: Farm equipments and vessels needed for poultry farms (utensils for feed and water) and specially designed cages for rearing quail are produced and sold in this unit.

Quail Farm: Quail chicks collected from high yielding parent stock are reared for five weeks and then sold to the needy. Quail eggs are also available for sale.

Training Institute: This institute was started to provide short term training for those seeking self employment, unemployed youths, and students of Alapuzha, Pathanamthitta and Kottayam districts in various subjects related to poultry rearing. It is now holding training programmes in animal husbandry and in service training for the para - veterinary staff of the State Animal Husbandry Department. NCERT national award for student friendly institute of 2001 was awarded to this unit.

19 Central Hatchery Souvenir, p.5.
Mobile Veterinary Hospital: The Central Hatchery was the first establishment in the whole of India in 1970 to accept the integration condition for egg production in the government sector. As part of an egg marketing scheme, societies were formed in various parts of Central Travancore and they were supplied with chicks and feed, and eggs produced were bought from them. The mobile unit formed for visiting the houses of the members of the society for providing preventive vaccination and distribution of medicines was later raised as a mobile veterinary hospital to provide treatment of the animals and insemination of the cattle.

Sales Counter: The various items produced or distributed by the Central Hatchery are sold to the public or private units from the sales counter of the Hatchery attached to the Hatchery in Chengannur. The counter operates from 10 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. with a break in the noon from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. It is one of the most popular public sales counter and is well engaged throughout the year.

The description above in the two phases of history gives us the picture of an economy that lost its agricultural flourish and trade significance it enjoyed in the past but without reaching any new economic heights internally. The temple centred economy is no more there. Besides the economic advantages from Chengannur as a pilgrim destination in view of its special significance as famous centres of Vaishnavites and Saivites got lost somewhere on the way, although all the ancient temples are alive to this day. Even the swell in the number of commuters from or distant places is a daily passing phenomenon as most of them hasten up with their onward journey as soon as they alight in Chengannur town. By and large, this is true in the case of the Sabarimala
pilgrims too. They do benefit the trade sector and the hotel industry in the town without much benefit percolating to the suburbs or interior regions.

Traditional industries and crafts show a mixed picture of both decline and survival. The traditional metal industries including the famous Aranmula Mirror industry survived rather successfully, despite severe competition from modern products. The traditional artisans slid down the scale, except the carpenters who have found new and increased demand for them in the wake of the boom in construction activities.

Significant scaling up of the economy came in the wake of the so called boom. The impact has been felt in the income of all the people. Activity rise and thereby employment growth took place significantly in the construction and tertiary sectors. However, there are critics who find fault with the wasteful constructions of large residential houses which remain almost unused.

The scepticism about the sustainability of the benefits from the Gulf boom seems to find validity in the case of Chengannur. The boom does not show now a scale of vigour as it had in the initial phase. However, even in the wake of gulf boom Chengannur presented a dimmer glare compared to that of the towns like Thiruvalla or Chenganassery. One view held around, and it seems valid too, is that the large majority of the people of Chengannur are less showy and orthodox in their spending habits than those in other areas. Therefore, while the income flow to the region might be comparable to that in any other region, the spending level and pattern seem to be different and favour less conspicuous consumption. The matter needs further probe before firm conclusions can be drawn about this.
The potential areas of development in Chengannur are sericulture, intercropping, intensive farming, dairying, and fresh water fish farming on the agricultural front. Traditional non-farm occupations await scaling up of their marketing facilities. Tourism linked to pilgrimage, religious festivals and traditional cultural events, especially boat regatta and patayani awaits as a potential area of development activity. Historical tourism offers another area of development in this region of age old civilization which bequeathed its pronounced imprints and surviving relics.