CHAPTER - II

POLITICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF KĒRA ṬA TEMPLES

Kēraḷa has a feeble presence in the pre-historic map of India. The early history of the land is also not fully known. The earliest mentions about Kēraḷaputtas come from the Rock Edict XIII of Aśōka Maurya. Early historic period popularly called the Sangam period, has coincided with Megalithic and Iron Age to a great extend. The sources of information regarding the period are mainly the material cultural evidences and the heroic poems. The poems cover a period from 300 BC to 400 AD\(^1\). During Sangam period, Kēraḷa was a part of the Tamiḻ country. The land also was the home of some famous poets of the Sangam texts. The early Cēras, who had their capital at Karur were the native rulers of Kēraḷa.

Archaeological remains by and large show that the material culture of Iron Age had diverse forms of subsistence. Antiquity of rice cultivation at certain pockets dates back prior to the Christian era. The Iron Age also witnessed the assimilation and acculturation towards the making of a homogenous linguistic culture in the Tamiḻ macro region.
The whole land was divided into five Tiṇais - Kuriṇci, Mullai, Marutam, Pālai and Neytal. These Tiṇais represent a division of the physiographic region into five different eco zones of hills and forests, pastures and thickets, riparian plains, parched lands and coastal tracts respectively. Inhabitants of these zones lived a life close to nature and in tune with their environment. The chief deity of Kuriṇci was Cēyōn, the war god; Māyōn was the god of cattle rearing inhabitants of Mullai; Vēṇṭan, the rain god was propitiated by the plough agriculturists of Marutam, blood-thirsty Koṟṟavai was the deity of fighters and robbers of Pālai and the fishermen folk of Neytal worshipped Kaṭalōn, the sea god².

The principle of relations of production and organisation was kinship. The concept of surplus and profit was absent in these communities. Beyond for sustenance, the produce was exchanged based on reciprocity or as gift, but not for value or profit³. The kin based production system, absence of organized military, absence of well defined kingdom and monarch are indicators of a society prior to state formation in the Sangam period⁴. Prevalence of ancestor worship in the Megalithic period, its continuation in the form of ‘Naḷukallu’ (Hero stone) worship in late Iron Age characterizes the religious system of the people⁵.

Andaṇa poets, who specialized in eulogy of heroes, also adopted certain styles and traditions from the mainland India, which reflect Sanskrit influence on their poem and also in native culture itself. The spread of śrāmaṇic sects like
Buddhism and Jainism also affected great influence. The north Indian tradition is mainly reflected in the importance ascribed to Vedic sacrifices like yāga and yajña. The description of yajña performances by Mūvēntars, especially Čēras, could be read as the assigning of north Indian royal imagery on these higher chieftains. The early Čēras are said to have practiced regular Vedic rituals and sacrifices. These sacrifices were performed by the full time priest class of Brāhmins. As reward to the services, the Brahmins received lands. The land donation practice laid to new production relations beyond the realm of kin-labour and distribution⁶.

Emergence of Brāhmin settlements demanded associated crafts and labourers group to meet the needs. Those settlements brought effective labour division with specialization which in turn increased the production. With hold over the knowledge base, control over resources and sanctioning ideologies of Varṇāśrama dharma, the Brāhmin settlements brought to the scenario a new social structure with different production and redistribution methods⁷.

Kēraḷa, though formed a part of Tamiḻ macro region, has a lot of ecological difference from it in the agro-climatic zone in terms of seasons, rainfall, landscape, soil structure, permeability, retention, resilience and so on. The wet rice landscape eco system has excess of water in contrast to further Tamiḻakam. Hence, the technology and labour process varied accordingly. The existence of developed technology of water management, knowledge of season
and practice of paddy agriculture and a leadership with coercive social control and appropriate institutional ideological means of large mobilization, division and realization of labour was need of the native ecosystem to become a viable productive land. The transformation of individual Brāhmaṇa household into corporation was the result of these needs. In this context, arouse in Kērala new formations of land holding and landless which eventually got mediated by intermediaries to form complex structure, characterized by specialized division of labour turning into hereditary occupations and non-economic coercive modes of social realization.

The basis of the social structure and the economic system of the Sangam society mainly depended on the uneven production and production systems of the Tiṇais. Prosperity of Marutam and lack of this prosperity in other Tiṇais created contradictory social systems which affected the whole Sangam society whose balance depended upon the well balanced relations of the Tiṇais. Even in the absence of solid evidences, a collapse of the existing social system is discernible. However, the period has been generally looked on as Kalabhra interregnum.

In post-Sangam period, once again historians come across scarcity of sources regarding the political life of Kēraḷa. The end of 3rd century AD marks the virtual end of Tamil heroic poems, reflecting the end of a society and social formation which it represented. Traditional historians ascribe the responsibility of this abrupt change to the ‘Kalabhra Interregnum’. The inroads and aggressive
marches of Kalabhras, a war-like group from Deccan, has been understood to be the cause for end of Sangam polity and absence of direct evidences to any other political events supported this view for long.

Dr. Rajan Gurukkal’s attempt to fill this gap spanning four centuries in south Indian history seems to be most appropriate. He proposes the reason for this change as the result of various transformations that the Sangam society faced as a byproduct of contradictory social and economic systems. Accordingly, incompatibility between kin-labor and plough technology contributed to coexistence of antagonistic social elements in the Sangam period. The shift from the glories of heroes and plundering chiefs in the previous heroic poems to the didactic compositions emphasizing social ethic, personal conduct, importance of peace, loyalty and social morality in 5th-6th centuries, mainly represented by Kīlkkaṇakku texts, are based on the Vēdic, Purāṇic and Śāstric prescriptions. They also speak of a society in need of these values. The conflicting forms of production at different Tiṇais intensified the contradiction of society leading to be wanting for values. The contradictory dynamic social formations had to face dissolution by itself. The dissolution process comprised a series of interconnected transition of economy, division of labour, social relations, political structure and ideology, transition from clan to hereditary occupation and caste, from chiefdom to monarchy and heterodox ideologies to Brāhmaṇism which all defined the shift in social formations from the early historic period to
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the state formation. However this transition was not altogether accidental or abrupt, rather it was gradual process of discontinuing of existing ideas and institutions and shaping of new social formations.

It is this slow and gradual nature of the process that justifies the absence of records of any specific events concerned. It is found that the principal chiefdom of Sangam society went into oblivion by the third century AD. The theory of Kalabhra attack and consequent social changes are not completely ruled out here. But taking the Kalabhra sole responsible towards all these transitions as held by traditional historians, seems unrealistic. The Kalabhra attack could have been a blow to an already struggling social set up\textsuperscript{10}.

Donation of land to sacrifice performing Brahmins is seen on the Patikam part of Patirṟuppattu text, it cannot be taken as prevalence of land grants to Brahmins, as the date of Patikam itself is in question, now it is almost accepted that the Patikam were later additions to the original Patirṟuppattu\textsuperscript{11}.

Next era in the Kēraḷa history dawns with the emergence of a number of Brāhmin settlements and temples at suitable locations. The role of royalty behind these establishments is absolutely untraceable. This also causes lack or absence of inscriptions drawing a blank regarding the evolution of settlements. However, the non-participatory role Brāhmins in the production process continued with stronger acceptance of validating ideologies. The outstanding development of the period is the emergence of state and monarchy in par with the contemporary
neighboring kingdoms. Conversion of occupational groups into Jāti with well
defined hierarchy was another development with far reaching implications\textsuperscript{12}.

All these Brāhmin settlements were centered on fertile patches of land,
because the very sustenance of their inhabitants depended on agriculture
production and could not afford to miss the natural favor of land\textsuperscript{13}. With the
employment of plough, agricultural production demanded division of labour and
specialization of work. This gradually paved way for a separation between the
land owners and labourer of the production in the Sangam period\textsuperscript{14}.

The transition from kin labour to non-kin labour, from thrust hoe to
plough, from millet to paddy, from clans to hereditary occupation group and cast,
chiefdom to monarchy, heterodox ideologies to Brāhmaṇism and from pre-rice
landscape to wet rice landscape characterize the society of early medieval
Kērala\textsuperscript{15}.

The emergence of new ideology of Bhakti is introduced in the Paripāṭal
text. The Bhakti-based temple institution was the expansion of structured
agrarian society. The geographical distribution of the temples dedicated to
Āgamic gods corresponds to the course of agrarian expansion, mirroring the
temple as sequel to the expansion of agriculture. The period of Bhakti poems is
between 5\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} centuries. These poems preach the ideology of devotion
towards a personal god.
Temples were the natural outcome of the changed social religious ideologies, manifested as its institutional expression. Hence, the initiative behind temple building cannot be linked with the royalty (state) or the people of the locality or even to any specific individuals in the initial period. Such initiatives emerged only after the temple established its position in the society as a center of social relations and resource redistribution. The emergence of temple institution does not owe allegiance to any patronage or personage, but to the changed milieu of the society.

The institutional manifestation of wet rice expansion in the form of Brahmadēya and Dēvadāna, the rise of temples as headquarters integrating agrarian relationships, proliferation of land rights through redistribution of endowments, generating of services based on the tenancy in land, accommodation of hereditary service groups, hierarchical arrangements of surplus production, ideological legitimization of social heirarchy, divinization of monarchy and formation of the state were the specific developments of the early the medieval in the Tamiḻ macro zone and Kērala micro region. The agrarian settlements which were corporation of land holders based on temple institution, enjoyed administrative authority also during the period¹⁶.

Brahmadēyams were groups of Brāhmin settlements in the peasant localities which were granted property and were formed into corporations of land owners¹⁷. These settlements were temple centered. The location of these
settlements on fertile tracts and river valleys was result of organizational ability, new technology, the calendar wisdom, etc. of the people. Whatever be the reasons, it is evident that these settlements were more civilized than others\textsuperscript{18}.

Bhrahadēyams existed in Pandyan kingdom prior to eighth century AD, but evidences of such establishments in the Cēra region are available from the 9\textsuperscript{th} the century AD onwards only\textsuperscript{19}.

The original charters recording the establishment of the settlements are lacking, but the Vāḷappiḷḷi copper plate inscription (812 AD) records subsidiary settlements of Tiruvalla grāmam, one of the later settlements, pointing to the existence of the main Tiruvalla grāmam and its division into subsidiary sections. It is thus logically assumable that the entire landscape was covered by a closely knit network of Brāhmin settlements by the time the Cēra state of Mahōdaypuram has been established\textsuperscript{20}. While the semi tribal population was converted into settled peasant communities and when agrarian expansion was accelerated, social stratification and hierarchical positioning became inevitable. These stratification and hierarchies were rationalized with the ideology of Jāti. This new society based on the above said rationale was supported by ideological sanction through the religions institutions and monuments. Temples turned to be the nerve centers of many social activities. The exposition of Itihāsa, Purāṇa and spreading the ideals of Bhakti through various forms of art are reflections of establishing the social sanction for the temple institution in the society\textsuperscript{21}.
Legends and traditions list 64 Brahmin settlements, 32 in Tulunadu and 32 in Kerala\textsuperscript{22} (Table No: 2.1).

2.1 Brahmasvam and Dēvasvam

Brahmasvam is the land owned by Brāhmins, it could be collective ownership also. However, it should not be taken as absolute ownership, as the Brāhmins were only a joint in the chain of ownership system. Their ownership was called ‘Iḍayīṭ’. The Brahmasvam was leased to Kārāḷar who paid a certain amount of produce to the Brāhmin landlord\textsuperscript{23}.

Dēvasvam was the land owned by temple or in principal the god. But in effect temple owners held the Dēvasvam too. There were councils called ‘Gaṇas’ to look after the affairs of Dēvasvam land, however its members also were the same owners of the temple\textsuperscript{24}. The temple staffs like priest, artist, staff in-charge of recital etc. were paid in ‘Virutti’ i.e. ownership on a fixed land and makes living from its produce. However, this group also did not directly involved in cultivation rather leased the land to Kārāḷar and extracted the share of the produce\textsuperscript{25}.

By the 7\textsuperscript{th} century AD the material cultural formations took a more definitive shape leading to the concentration of political power and what is called the ‘state’. This was the result of various material cultural developments like
expansion of agriculture on fertile river valleys leading to surplus production, emergence of trade as an instituted process involving notions of price and profit\textsuperscript{26}. Thus Kērala had all characteristics of the ‘early medieval’ with indigenous flavors. The major states to emerge in this period were the Āy with capital at Ėlijimala in southern Kērala and Kulaśēkharas with their capital at Mahōdayapuram or Makōtai in central Kērala.

A text that gives some information and allusions to this period is ‘Kēralōlpatti’ (literally means the origin of Kērala). Kēralōlpatti is narrative in Sanskritized Malayalam prose written in lines with the Purāṇa-Itihāsa tradition of mainland India. These treatises are many in number scattered in palm leaf manuscripts and hailing from a vast time bracket of 7\textsuperscript{th} to 12\textsuperscript{th} century AD owing to additions and modifications. The text being written by different authors at different times has different versions under the same title. The composition is a reflection of the historical sense of people who assigned a great deal of importance on land ownership. Its earliest available manuscript is dated to 1527 AD (KE 702)\textsuperscript{27}.

Though versions vary, the basic content remains the same. Accordingly, Kērala was created from the ocean by Paraśurāma. All the available versions uniformly follow same chronological scheme under the heads of ‘the Age of Paraśurāma’, ‘the Age of Perumāls’ and ‘the Age of Tampurāns’\textsuperscript{28}. The Age of Paraśurāma narrates the creation of land and endowing it to the Brāhmins
brought from north India to inhabit the land. These Brāhmins settled in 64 grāmas were also assigned the administrative duties. The second period that of Perumāls, began out of the realization that administration was not the business of Brāhmin and a collective decision was reached to bring a Kṣatriya to take up the task of ruling. Thus a Kṣatriya and his sister were brought. The Kṣatriya was anointed on throne and his sister was married to a native Brāhmin with the agreement that their progeny would be a Kṣatriya according to the matrilineal system of succession and the descendants of this sister would be the successors to the throne. The king was assisted and advised by councils called Nālu Taḷi (the four temples). This council had eight members, two each from one of the four leading Brāhmaṇical settlements viz., Muzhikkulam, Airanikkulam, Irunnatikkutal and Paravur and having their seats in the temples in the capital at Mēltaḷi, Kīḷtaḷi, Cinnapuram Taḷi, and Netiya Taḷi respectively. This was a period of political unification in Kēraḷa. The third period is that of Tampurāns. The various versions show differences in narrative in this section where as the first two sections have much uniformity. This period assigns very little significance to the Brāhmin settlements and power concentration in local levels under landed Nāirs is the new development in the period. The elaborate description of Māmāṅkam celebration claims a major portion of this section and presents Sāmūtiri as the sovereign of the whole of Kēraḷa.
However, the Kēralōlpatti lack qualities of a historical text in its modern sense and also suffer from chronological discrepancies. Yet the text is a source for historical studies, because primarily it reflects the indigenous historical sense and consciousness. Secondly, though much biased and exaggerated, certain historical facts are either directly or indirectly alluded to. The establishment of Varṇāśramadharma of Vēdic lore into Kēraḷa’s society could be traced to in the Age of Perumāls, where well defined functions are assigned to social classes. The huge presence of Brāhmīns in the political economy of Kēraḷa as ‘power behind the Throne’, and the subservience of the ruler to the Brāhmin groups and the prominent place of temples in matters beyond religion and spirituality could be read in the Kēralōlpatti. The text could be called a conscious attempt to legitimize this new socio-political structure and thus history been used as handmaid to establish this authority.

The new social formation take a definite form by 6-7\textsuperscript{th} century AD with shift from primitive agriculture and animal husbandry to study expansion of plough agriculture across wetland, proliferation of Brahmadēya villages throughout the fertile tracts of the major river valleys like Kāvēri and Periyār. In literature, the ideas of ethics and values being indirectly emphasized, inscriptions recording Land transaction in place of cave labels, ultimately coming with over arching, legitimizing institution of temple based on the Bhakti ideologies. The whole process was of intricate changes affecting various aspects of social life. In
the early historic period, the religious ideologies of Kerala were a mixture of different cults and rituals like animism, ancestor worship, hero worship and anthropomorphic deity worship. The śrāmaṇic religions like Jainism and Buddhism also excreted a definite level of influence on the society. The Brāhmaṇical concepts, at this period existed with lesser implication on society. The practice of Vēdic sacrifices (Vēlvi) and its patronage from Cēra chieftains, eulogizing of the patron by equating him with gods such as Sūrya, Agni, Mārut etc. also exist. But the prominence of Brāhmaṇical religion was achieved only in the changed social formations with new land production relations. The shift of prominence from śrāmaṇic ideologies through Vēdic, Brāhmaṇical to the temple-based Bhakti leading to Āgamic mode of worship developed during 7th - 8th centuries AD\textsuperscript{31}.

By the early 9th century AD, with increased availability of inscriptive and literary evidences a new society with characteristics of ‘state’ is visible in Kēraḷa, like other parts of south India. Most remarkable change in this period was the phenomenal expansion of agriculture. Unequal distribution of surplus, proliferation of trading and urban centers and artisanal activities lead to the division of society into distinct and mutually antagonistic classes. The coinciding widespread use of literacy and emergence of the monumental religious architecture must be viewed in relation to this expansion of agriculture and the changed socio economic structure\textsuperscript{32}.
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2.2 Kulaśēkharas of Mahōdayapuram

Political scenario of Kērala from 9th to 12th century AD is represented by the rule of Perumāḷs or Kulaśēkharas of Mahōdayapuram, who are also called as later Cēra rulers. There are no evidences to connect the later Cēra with the early Sangam Cēra of Karur or the Kongu Cēra. More than seventy five inscriptions are ascribed to the Perumāḷs directly and about eighty inscriptions are indirectly connected to them 33.

Origin and foundation of these ruling families is unknown, except for the legend in the Kēralōlpatti. Cēramānār is the earliest known royal name and his period is dated towards end of 8th century AD. Earliest known true ruler of Perumāḷ line is Rājaśēkhara Varman (c. 800-844 AD). It is difficult to assert that the Kulaśēkharas belonged to the lineage of old Cēra rulers. But it is certain that these later Cēras had their capital at Mahōdayapuram or Makotai identified with modern Kodungallur in Tṛśūr district. The capital city was built around the Śiva temple at Tiruvanchikkulam 34, which was very well planned. According to Śankaranārāyaṇīyam, the royal residence was in the Gōtra Mallēśvaram area of the capital 35.

A new epoch in Kērala history begun in the 9th century AD with the establishment of Kulaśēkhara rule with their capital at Mahōdayapuram. The whole of Kērala except the extreme north was unified under one rule for about three centuries from 800 to 1124 AD 36. The period marked an all pervasive
transformation in the political, social and cultural fields. The period was marked by the revival of religious ideas and introduction of Bhakti ideology under efforts of Kulaśēkhara Āḻvār, Cēramān Perumāḷ Nāyanār, Sundaramūrti Nāyanār and Nammāḻvār, evolution of Malayalam language as a distinct entity and ascendancy of theocratic oligarchy of the Brāhmīns37.

The true founder of the Kingdom was Kulaśēkhara Varman (800-820AD), identified as Kulaśēkhara Āḻvār. The king was a patron of Vaiṣṇava religion and has literary compositions like Mukundamāla (in Sanskrit) and Perumāḷ Tirumoḷi (in Tamil) to his credit. Kulaśēkhara was succeeded by Rājaśēkhara Varman, popularly known as Cēramān Perumāḷ Nāyanār. He ruled from 820-844 AD. Unlike his predecessor, Rājaśēkhara was a Śaivite and has placed his own contribution to the religion’s development. His reign coincides with evolution of the new era, the ‘Kollam Era (Kollam Āṇḍu)’ in 824-825 AD, which was popularly used in inscriptions, verses and manuscripts in subsequent period38.

The third ruler in the line was Sthāṇu Ravi Varma, who ruled from 844 to 885 AD. The economic and political activities of the king are known from the Tarissapalli copper plate grant, the Tillaisthānam temple record, the Tirunandikkara inscription, Śankaranārāyana’s commentary on Laghubhāskarīyam, inscription found from Kūṭālmāṇikkam temple. He was a staunch Śaivite. The inscriptions record the land grant to the Christian merchant, the establishment of Christian settlements in Sthāṇu Ravi’s kingdoms. The
flourishing trade with Arab and China could be learnt from the accounts of Arab traveler Sulaiman. His rule was a time of religious toleration and economic development. Laghubhäskarīyam also notes that the king was well versed in astronomy and established an observatory in the capital. Sthāṇu Ravi was succeeded by his son Rāmavarma Kulaśēkhara (885 to 917 AD), who did not adopt any specific religious policies.

Next ruler in the lineage was Köthai Ravi Varman (917-947 AD). His inscription found at Nityavicārēsvaram Taḷi temple records the meeting of Taḷiyāthiris and land grant. His other inscriptions are found in Purnatrayisa Viṣṇu temple at Tripunithura, Śiva temple at Avittattur, Chokkur and Triprangodu. His title as ‘Manukulāditya’ is mentioned in the inscriptions of Muzhikkulam temple and Tiruvalla temple\(^{39}\). During his rule the Āys were weakened by the Colas under Parantaka Cōḷa and gradually major parts of the Āy kingdom were merged with the Cēra kingdom. It is noteworthy that Parantaka Cōḷa never ventured to attack the Cēras, which indicates the possibility of a strong army maintained by the Kulaśēkhara.

Indu Kōta Varma succeeded Köthai Ravi Varman in 944 AD and ruled till 962 AD. He is known from inscriptions at Taḷi, Trikkakkara, Muzhikkulam and Tiruvanvandur. It was during his period that Kongunāḍ which was under the suzerainty Cēras was attacked by Parantaka Cōḷa, but without serious effect on the Central Cēra rule. During Indu Kota’s rule the construction of temples,
arrangements for Brähmin feeding (Vāram) and the establishment of Brahmadēyas assumed considerable importance. Consequently the power of the Nambūtiris increased steadily\textsuperscript{40}. However, his religious affiliation is yet to be known.

Indu Kōta was succeeded by Bhāskara Ravi I (962-1013 AD). Bhāskara Ravi too followed a policy of religious toleration conjoined with economic flourishing. The Jewish copper plate of 1000 AD attest the donation of many concessions on trade to a Jewish merchant named Joseph Rabban. There have been found more than 20 inscriptions bearing the name Bhāskara Ravi. Historians differ in opinion regarding the number of kings bearing the name. According to one view there was more than one ruler bearing the name Bhāskara Ravi.

Next ruler in the lineage was Bhāskara Ravi II who ruled from 1018 to 1021 AD. Many historians are of the opinion that the Čēra kingdom was attacked by Rajendra Cola which weakened the Čēra rule itself. The later rulers of the kingdom like Vīra Kērala (1021-1028 AD), Rājasimha (1028-1043 AD), Bhāskara Ravi III (1043-1082 AD), Ravi Varma (1082-1090 AD) and Rāma Varma Kulaśēkhara (1090-1124 AD) were comparatively weak in their administrative skills and unable to carry over the legacy of their glorious past successfully.
Subsequently, the kingdom disintegrated. The final blow to the Kulaśēkhara rule has come from the Cōla attack. Thus the kingdom had to disintegrate into the Vēṇāḍu in south, Kōlathunāḍu in north and Perumpaḍappu Svarūpa in central Kēraḷa\textsuperscript{41}. The period also saw the evolution of the feudal polity in Kēraḷa with all its attendant social evils. Later, Vēṇāḍu developed and formed the Travancore state by the middle of 18\textsuperscript{th} century. Calicut remained strong under the Sāmūtiri (Zamorin) and the Perumpaḍappu Svarūpa developed into Cochin State during the time. These three were the rulers of Kēraḷa when European era began after the discovery of sea route by Vasco Da Gama in 1498 AD. The Mysore invasions in latter half of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century hastened the decline of feudal polity. It was followed by British rule which came into effect with the treaties made with Samutiri (Zamorin) of Malabar and rulers of Cochin and Travancore by the British.

The Kulaśēkhara rule in Kēraḷa marks a water-shed in its history. The period witnessed socio-political dominance of Aryan Brāhmins, the unique caste system, matrilineal, plurality and co-existence of various faiths, the evolution of Malayāḷam as a separate dialect, the rise of temples and ritual oriented to Hinduism and the decline of śrāmanic religions with the rise of merchant guilds and progress in the field of trade and economy\textsuperscript{42}.

The title used by the Kulaśēkharas was Perumāl, denoting emperor, they were also known as Cēramān Perumāls. The Brāhmin upper hand in the
governance and influence on the king is testified by the council of Nālu Taḷi. The theoretical base for the kingship was drawn from Smṛtis and Śāstras. Although traditions speak of matrilineal system, the kingship was handed over in a patrilineal system\(^{43}\).

The Cēra polity, like its contemporaries, was characterized by feudal system augmented from land grants and social stratification. The kingdom was divided into administrative units, Nāḍus (provinces) under the authority of Nāḍuvāḷis (Chieftains). Nāḍus had representative assemblies called Nāṭṭukūttangal. Vēṇāḍu Munnūṛruvar (300 members), Oḍanāḍu Munnūṛruvar, Nanrulaināḍu Munnūṛruvar and Kīḻmalaināḍu Munnūṛruvar are examples of these Nāṭṭukūttangal known from inscriptions. Nāḍus were sub divided into Dēśams under the authority of Dēsavāḷis whose activities were regulated by local assemblies called Dēśakkūttangal. Dēśams were further divided into Karās or villages which were looked after by representatives of village members. The towns had popular representative assemblies, like Aṟunūṛruvar (600 members), Aṉūṛruvar (500 members) and Munnūṛruvar (300 members). There were strong merchant guilds called Maṇigrāmam and Aṉcuvaṇṇam at village and towns and at the centre called Āyirathavār (1000 members). The king was at the head of the government. The officials assisted him were Kōyiladhikārikal (in charge of Temple affairs) which was ex-officio position held by the crown prince; Nāḍuvāḷis, Dēsavāḷis and Kōlkāran\(^{44}\).
2.3 Religious Background:

Earliest evidences of religious ideas in Kēraḷa are traced from the Meegalithic period. Evidences of burials dominate the material remains of the period. Naḍukallu (hero stone), rock-cut chamber tombs, dolmenoid cists, kuḍakkallu (umbrella stone) and toppikkallu (cap stone) are monuments of megalithic period. The worship and fear towards the dead and belief in soul or life after death could have characterized their religion. Cult of dead, cult of heroism, ancestral worship was the religion of indigenous megalithic people. The variations in the sarcophagi and its association with people at different levels are reflections of cultural differences within a set of common notions and values around death rites expressed with differences in form and magnitude as determined by the uneven developed material culture and the features of the ecological systems⁴⁵.

Kēraḷa was a part of the geographic unit called Tamiḻakam until the closing centuries of the first millennium AD. The whole area had linguistic unity with Tamiḻ as the native language. In the subsequent centuries Buddhism and Jainism made their establishment. They had found acceptance throughout the length and breadth of the land. Some of the important Jaina centers emerged at Kallil near Perumbavur, Matilakam in central Kēraḷa, Sultan Battery at Wayanad in northern Kēraḷa and Chitril and Nagar Kovil in far south of Kēraḷa. Buddhism acquired wider acceptance in Kēraḷa than Jainism. Many of the early Hindu
temples of Kēraḷa were originally Buddhists centers which were converted subsequently. The very concept of lord Śāsta itself is argued to be of Buddhist origin. ‘Paḷḷi’ was the term used to denote non-Brāhmanical places of worship. The words ‘Paḷḷi’ and ‘Paḷliccadams’ occur in inscriptions referring to such non-Brāhmaṇical establishments\textsuperscript{46}. Architectural features like circular and apsidal plan also allude to this Buddhist link.

Śrīmūlavāsam was the most celebrated of the Buddhist shrines of Kēraḷa in 9-10\textsuperscript{th} century AD, which could be identified in the area between Trikkunnapuzha and Karumadi in the Alappuzha district. Place names with suffix and prefix of ‘Paḷḷi’ are an indicator of its Buddhist link. (eg. Paḷḷikunnu, Paḷlippuram, Edapaḷḷi, Karunagappalḷi, Paḷlikkal etc.). Another important centre of Buddhism was Tṛkkaṇāmatilakam which turned into a centre of learning and knowledge. Many literary works like Śilappādikaram and Maṇimēkhalai attest the importance of the place in this regard. Tṛkkaṇāmatilakam is identified with present day Matilakam near Kodungallur\textsuperscript{47}.

Jainism too had its centers in Kēraḷa. The religion had played important role in the region from 6\textsuperscript{th} to 10\textsuperscript{th} century A.D\textsuperscript{48}. Proper history of Jainism in Kēraḷa is yet to be written. From many inscriptions it is traced that Jain temple lands were known as Paḷliccadams and a wide distribution of these lands are traceable through inscriptions\textsuperscript{49}. Epigraphs also say that the Jain monks resided in Caitya or Vihāra known as Kottams\textsuperscript{50}. Some of the present day temples show
traces of their Jain origin. The Kūṭalmāṇikkam temple at Irinjalakkuda and the Kallil cave temple near Perumbavur are the best examples. Jain influence on the Malayalam language is also discernable.\footnote{51}

However by the end of the 8\textsuperscript{th} century AD, these śrāmanic religions had to face a setback on account of growing Brāhmaṇical religion. All non-Vēdic places of worship were converted into Hindu places of worship.\footnote{52} For nearly eight centuries, Buddhism and Jainism have co-existed in Kēraḷa as important faiths, contributing in its own way to the social and architectural development in the region. These Śrāmanic religions have left their unabated influence in the religious, social and cultural life of Kēraḷa.

The changed political situation, the strong establishment of Brāhmins in social and religious life and the new codified rule of the Kulaśēkhara Perumāḷs, did not favour the Buddhism or Jainism. The period from end of 8\textsuperscript{th} century AD witnessed spread of Brāhmaṇical religion and many personalities working towards it. The Ālvārs and Nāyanārs gave a new life to this movement with Bhakti ideology, gradually paving way for the decline of Buddhism and Jainism.

The changed scenario brought two sects of Brāhmaṇical religion to the forefront, viz. Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism. These Brāhmaṇical religions, under the strong material and moral patronage of the Kulaśēkhara Perumāḷs, became the mainstream religions of the land from end of 8\textsuperscript{th} century AD, leaving the former religions into oblivion. This new rouse in the religion also gave a strong impetus
to the temple building activity. The new movement received enhanced support also from the changed material culture and socio-economic formations. Mention must be made in this regard about the opening up of the fertile river valleys for agricultural purposes and their development into agrarian corporations. The surplus production enhanced economic prosperity and remarkably, the exclusive ownership of the fertile productive lands by the Brähmin settlements, who were also the authorities and propagators of the temple institution, accelerated building of temples in the length and breadth of Kēraḷa. These temples, due to the economic prosperity of its builders have imposing structure with elaborate architecture. However, the numbers of enclosures are less in this period, because many of these features were later additions.

Bhakti movement reached Kerala in 9th century AD, only after reaching a very mature stage of development through two centuries in the eastern part of Tamilakam. From literature of the Āḻvārs we find 13 sacred Vaiṣṇava centers in Kerala (Table 2.2).

Among these thirteen, except Tiruvittakkōḍ, all twelve are praised by Nammāḻvār in ‘Tiruvāyomoḻi’. In ‘Periyatirumoḻi’ of Tirumankai we get information of Tiruvallavāḷ, Tirumūḻikkuḻam and Tirunāvāya. Tiruvittakkōḍ is described in the ‘Perumāḻ Tiruvāyomoḻi’ of Kulaśēkhara Aḻvār. The period of this literature is placed in 9-10th century AD and this date is supported by inscriptions of the same period, mostly found from temples.
In the Cēra kingdom, the only Śaiva temple to attract Nāyanārs was the Tiruvaṅcikkuḷam Mahādēva temple located near the capital city of Mahōdayapuram. It finds description in the compositions of Sunadara Mūrti Nāyanār and Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ Nāyanār.

The focus of Bhakti poems were the individual deity of each temple, attributed with human nature and its abode, the temple. Glorification of these gods not only evoked new religious awareness, but also established a sense of equality on devotee with the deity. Offering of the ‘self’ to this super human god with human attributes was the underlying idea of all the Bhakti literature. The concept of equality, yet being obliged to the extent of sacrificing the self, was in a way, reflection of the contemporary social relations.

Recital of epics and Purāṇas were also a part of āgamic religion and for propagation of Bhakti. There were special temple staffs designated as ‘Mahābhārata bhaṭṭa’ appointed for the duty of recital alone and he was paid remuneration through virutti.

The various performing arts, mainly the Kūttu or the Sanskrit drama, also presented themes from these epics and Purāṇas or other literature based on the Bhakti ideology. Acceptance and propagation of many ideas from the Dharmaśāstras and Vēdangas (as evidenced from a number of inscriptions) also supported the same cause. The bhakti movement itself with temples being their transmission centers and associated rituals and expression through art forms,
adoption of śāstric ideas from mainland India, all worked towards the validation and legitimization of the contemporary social system. Temples acted as the brain and face of all these developments.

The temples were often centers of the agrarian settlements. Unlike the masses who propitiated regional deities of respective Tiṇais, the ruling class (Cēras) followed Vēdic religion with specific yajñas and yāgas performed by the Brāhmin priests. But this religious ideology is substantially changed in the new social formations that brought ‘state’. Religious institutions were built up in the form of temples and these were mostly imposing structures. Most notable is their location, which always found in association with productive agricultural settlements. The temple owning Brāhmins, also being the unproductive owners of cultivation land, needed certain ideologies to legitimize their ownership. Emergence and solidification of the institution of jāti was an instrument towards this legitimization. Consecration and warship of Agamic deities were introduced in place of old Vēdic religion. Evidence to the emergence of the new religion can be found in some of the later Sangam works like Kalittokai and Paripāṭal. With the idea of devotion to ‘personal’ god (the Bhakti ideology), the god himself needed to be confined within the reaches of his devotee. Thus, temples were constructed to serve as the abode of these personal gods. As a matter of fact, the devotee’s preference for location of temple was always determined by the productivity of land and command over it. This in turn became the location of the
divine abode. The Bhakta (devotee) being only the instrument in the hands of the god, the ultimate responsibility of the actions performed by the bhakta vested with the actual doer, the god. The god was not only responsible for his devotee’s actions, but also actual owner of all possessions of the devotee too. Thus, the Bhakti ideology was used at its best to legitimize the new socio economic stratification, which was the result of the changed pattern in the land ownership, the relations of production and system of redistribution\textsuperscript{57}.

Though the Bhakti ideology worked as a legitimizing factor, it cannot be considered as planned and structured product of a deep conspiracy. Rather it is seen that, partly these ideas were the obvious outcome of the situation and their application, as a conscious attempt towards fulfilling the social needs.

Thus a temple in the 8\textsuperscript{th} or 9\textsuperscript{th} century AD represented an institution with complex socio economic functions in addition to its very own religious nature. Being the coordinator of production and redistribution process, the temples also had to serve the needs raised out of this function. The very temple architecture also incorporates certain ideas pertaining to the agricultural production. Appeasing of the god to get favorable climate for agriculture and control over supernatural phenomenon became a goal of worship in the temple. The number of temple staff and their hierarchy also varied according to the material strength of the temples. Unlike the previous periods, in the āgamic worship rituals accompanied with mantras and stōtras played a major role and their performance
was exclusively the right of the Brhāmins. These activities took place in the
garbhaṅgha and the namaskāra-maṇḍapa of the temple, into which only the
Brāhmin was allowed. Tiṭappalḷi or Kitchen for preparation of offering and
muḷayaṟa the place of ritual germination of cereals for annual festival were
located within the temple structure. There existed systems of feast separately for
Brāhmin and non-Brāhmin. Such feasts attracted people from different social
hierarchies to the temple. Annual festivals attracted donations and gifts from
royalty and other well to do to people to the temple. These festivals and rituals
thus link the resource mobilization and the fertility cult.

The temple institution of the early medieval Kēraḷa controlled and
regulated every level of resource production and its distribution. It is on the
ignorance about the true forces of production that the fertility cult is based. The
temple represent an institute emerged in a society where two contradictory facts
about production existed: a group of people with scientific knowledge of
production but not producing and another group of people with no scientific
knowledge but only practical logic engaged in actual production. This
combination of knowledge with inactivity and ignorance with activeness was the
perfect place to combine the fertility cult with āgamic religion, to satisfy the
social needs of both the groups. The god in the temple was the icon of fertility as
well as commanding power. Ascribing the epithet ‘Cakravati’ to the deity and
ascribing divinity to the king were attempts to create new royal image, and this in
turn practiced by equalizing the society’s devotion to god and the subject’s obligation to the Cakravarti (the ruler).\(^5^9\)

The royal image of the deity also created the necessary ideologies to build an obligatory relation among the production process from bottom to top and temples were the key centers of these ideologies. The bhakti ideologies stabilized the sustainability of the contemporary social relationships.\(^6^0\)

From the foregoing it becomes clearly evident that temples emerged in Kēraḷa by 9\(^{th}\) century as result of various social changes. The advancement in material culture of the people, its byproduct social hierarchy and the new outlook into religion with devotion, Bhakti ideology, were the reasons for development of temple institution in early medieval Kēraḷa. Once established as an important social centre, these temples further expanded in number as well as in the dimension of its structure.
2.4 Notes and References

3. Ibid. p. 5
4. Ibid p. 93
6. Ibid p. 98
9. Ibid p. 100
10. Ibid p. 192
13. Ibid. p. 113
14. Ibid. p. 88
16. Ibid p. 15
18. Ibid pp. 5-6
19. Ibid p. 206
20. Ibid pp. 207-208
22. Ibid. p. 223
(Malayalam). Vallathol Vidyapeetham, Sukapuram. p. 42
24. Ibid. p. 117
25. Ibid. p. 119
(Malayalam). Vallathol Vidyapeetham, Sukapuram. p. 13
51. Ibid. p. 229
52. Ibid. p. 215
54. Ibid p.194
60. Ibid p.188