Kerala state occupies the South-Western tip of the Indian peninsula and lies between $8^\circ 13'$ and $12^\circ 43'$ North latitude and between $74^\circ 52'$, $77^\circ 24'$ east longitude. The land comprises the narrow coastal strip bounded by the Western Ghats on the East and the Arabian Sea on the west. This geographical position helped it to ensure to some extent the political and cultural isolation from the rest of the country, and facilitated its extensive contacts with countries of the outside world. Kerala seldom felt the impact of the many foreign invasions and of the political changes that took place in the other parts of India. Yet it was not totally immune from the political and cultural impacts of the neighbouring territories.

The Arabian Sea has been the permanent decisive factor in the history of Kerala. From time immemorial the long coastal line was studded with a number of sea-ports, the relative importance of which had fluctuated from age to age. In ancient Kerala commercial and cultural contacts were kept up with foreign countries through ports like Muziris, Tyndis, Barace and Nelcynda. Ports like Cochin,
Quilon and Calicut came into prominence in later periods of Kerala history. The Greek writers and Arab geographers have mentioned large number of ports. The contacts between Kerala and the outside world in ancient and medieval periods had been mainly commercial and cultural in character. Thus the isolation to which Kerala was subjected by the Western Ghats was more than compensated by the extensive foreign contacts facilitated by its long sea coast on the west.

The Arabs, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Phoenicians, the Israelites, the Greeks, the Romans and the Chinese were among the foreign peoples who had contacts with the Kerala coast in the ancient and medieval periods. These foreign contacts mainly commercial in nature led to the introduction of such religions as Christianity, Judaism and Islam into the land at a very early period of history and helped to mould the composite cosmopolitan culture of Kerala. Not only the natives but also the traders were benefitted by these contacts. As observed by Logan, "It is certain that Indian ideas and practices contributed largely to the form which orthodox Christianity in the west adopted first. Monasteries, nunneries, tonsures, rosaries, confession and celibacy all seem to have found
their way to Europe from Indian sources. And in return the West seems to have given to the East, arts and sciences, architecture, the art of coining money and in particular the high ideal of religion contained in Christianity. In this multi-cultural amalgam founded by the happy union of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, are a bewildering range of cultural patterns. It is to this co-existence and mutual reliance that a prominent historian used the term 'cultural symbiosis'.

Kerala presents a picture of rare tropical beauty and rich fertility. The State lies in the path of both the South-West and North-East monsoons. The average annual rainfall of ninety-six inches, increasing to a much higher rate in the northern areas, placed the area in the 'rain forest' classification. Its forests abound in a variety of birds and animals. The flora and fauna reflect this climatic condition. The peacock and the monkey had the place of honour among the exports from

2. Francis Buchanan, one of the first Europeans to travel extensively through the interior of Kerala remarked, "The territory through which I passed is the most beautiful I have ever seen". A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar. London (1807), Vol. II, p. 347.
ancient Kerala to foreign countries. The forests of Kerala abound in some of the rarest species of timber which have been very much in demand in foreign markets. The teak-wood from Kerala found its way to foreign countries even centuries before the dawn of the Christian Era, as is evidenced by the discovery of teak in the ruins of Ur. The magnificent teak of Kerala forests appears to have been used for the building of ships that fought in the battle of Trafalgar and brought victory to Nelson. 3 Abu Zayd the Arab traveller of Ninth century refers the carpenters from Umman building boats in the country of coconut trees. 4 Unfortunately these valuable forests especially of the eastern mountain - region is gradually giving way to the encroachment of man in his desperate search for abode. The forty-one west-flowing rivers and the continuous chain of lagoons and back-water facilitate communication and transport.

It was the spices of the land that had attracted the Arabs, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Phoenicians the Isrealites, the Greeks, the Romans and the Chinese.

from early times. The Assyrians and the Babylonians of the second millennium B.C. carried an extensive trade in cardamom and cinnamon that came from Kerala. The ancient Egyptians prepared perfumes and holy oil for mummification from the spices. Cinnamon is referred to as one of the ingredients of the holy anointing oils and perfumes in the rituals of Tabernacle erected in Sinai by Moses in 1490 B.C. It is needless to refer to the "great train with camels that bore spices" to Solomon (1015-960 B.C.) from Sheba. Sandal wood, peacock and monkey purely of Indian origin had reached Solomon from Tarshis. As their names in Hebrew are of Dravidian origin, Tarshis could be somewhere in South India later fallen into obscurity.  

Among the Phoenicians and Arabs, the Arabs of Oman and of the Persian Gulf area, might have undertaken the first sea voyages to Kerala for cinnamon. A land route from Sind through the ancient province of Godrosia and Hormosia and through Persia and Bassora existed which brought spices from South to West Asian ports. Solomon's fleet had sailed to the east to bring gold, ivory, apes

and peacocks from Ophir. Ophir has been identified by some scholars with Payvar in Trivandrum District and by others with Beypur in Kozhikode District. Though there is also a view that the place was not located anywhere in Kerala.6

Dioscorides (40–90 A.D.), the Greek physician in his materia medica had mentioned the medical virtues of caradmom, cinnamon, ginger, turmeric and pepper. Discovery of 'Hippalus' brought India nearer. Roman ships sailed direct to Muziris (Cranganore), from Ocelis in 40 days, bringing gold and precious metals and returned with pepper and other spices. Warmington traces the route direct from Muziris to Italy7 when Alaric, the Goth besieged Rome he demanded 3000 pounds of pepper as indemnity.8 The vast hordes of Roman coins unearthed in different parts of South India are sufficient to prepare a chronology of Roman Emperors. Pliny estimated that Roman empire paid out

6. Ibid., p. 12. Dr. Shamshulla Qadiri holds the view that the port from where these goods were exported was surely in South India and later fallen into obscurity.
7. Leaving Muziris to Alexandria by way of Berenice and Captos up the Nile took about 94 days. If ships were available they may go direct to Italy or take a coasting voyage.
annually a hundred million sesterces (about 1,08,750 d.) to India, China and Arabia for purchase of luxuries. Pepper was known as 'Yavana priya' (dear to Romans). The Greeks have mentioned the ports like Naura, Tyndis, Musiris, Carur, Basare (Badagara), Nelcynda (Srekantapuram) and Cottiara (Kuttanadu) as the major ports of the age.

A Chinese coin of 3rd century B.C. discovered from Chandravalli, suggests the existence of Chinese trade with South India. Not long after the birth of Christ there had been colonies of Arab and Persian traders on the West-Coast of Sumatra, who frequented the South Indian Harbour of Madura. Marco Polo had noticed the trade in pepper, ginger and cinnamon in West Asia and China. In the city of Hanchow he was informed by the customs officer of Kublai Khan, the Chinese emperor, that the daily amount of pepper bought was 43 loads, each load being 243 pounds or a total of 10,449 pounds. Referring to the city of Zaitun, Marco Polo says that the quantity of pepper imported there was so considerable that what was carried to Alexandria to meet the demands of Western parts of the world was not more than even a hundredth part. The revenue from this pepper trade was enormous. In the

ships the number of crew differed from 150 to 300 men and
cargo capacity was from 5000 to 6000 baskets or mats of
pepper.

There were other groups like Somalis who sometimes
subjugated the south Arabian trading centres. With
the rise of powerful empires and political powers on the
route the importance of each group in trade varied.

The rulers of Kerala had extended warm welcome
to the foreign traders. Facilities for trade were provided
and they were given quarters to reside and to build their
own houses. Symbols of honour were conferred on them.
Concessions of taxes were a part of the deal. Such were
the cases of Bhaskara Ravi's (962 A.D. to 1020) grants
to Jewish chieftain Joseph Rabban (1000 A.D.) and the grant
of Ayyan Atikal (349 A.D.) Governor of Venad to Mar Sapur
Iso, the Christian merchant prince. Zamorin's gift to
Muccunti mosque (13th century) may also be included in this
series. Mar Sapur Iso was called the founder of the
'Nagaram' in the grant. We will see the Zamorins' welcome
to the Arabs in the forthcoming pages. The reason for
the tolerance and generosity was the fact that the early
Jews and Christians came to this undeveloped semi-tribal
Dravidian society, devoid of naval power and coinage with
ship-loads of gold and prospects of trade. The interest
of trade might have induced harmony in spite of religious and racial differences. Therefore the Christian church established by Mar Sapir Iso in the 9th century came under the protection of the state and the king himself ordered Ilavar, Vellalar, Taccar, Vannar etc. to co-operate with the latter. 10

Coming to the 5th century A.D. there was a change in the control of spice trade. This was caused by the fall of the Roman Empire and on account of the Indians' reluctance to leave the Indian soil. The vacuum was filled by the Arabs and Persians engaging in a steadily growing intercoastal trade. The history of the Arabs on Indian ocean is of an expanding commerce which reached its peak in the 9th century of Christian era. 11

The Arabs had settled in Sumatra and Ceylon by the first century A.D. 12 It is also believed that the Arabs and Persians had formed a small colony on the West-Coast of Sumatra. 13 By 753 A.D. the colony of Arabs in Canton had become large enough to attack and pillage the

10. M.G.S. Narayanan, Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala, p. 5.
13. S.N.H. Nair, Java as noticed by Arab Geographers, p. 23.
city. The rise and spread of Arab political power within a few years of the rise of Islam engulfing vast territories from Western Africa to the borders of China and from Caucasus to the Southern shores of Arabia was an important factor in contributing to the development of Indo-Arab trade. The greatest impetus to Indo-Arab trade was given when Bagdad was founded by Abbasid Caliph Abu Ja far al-Mansur, for now for the first time the capital of Arab empire was directly linked by water with Arabian Sea through the water system of Tigris and Euphrates which jointly flowed to the Persian Gulf.\(^\text{14}\) The interruption of non-Muslim trading activity by the Islamic expansion in West Asia helped the Arabs gradually to strengthen their trading might everywhere and to acquire a virtual monopoly of commerce in the Indian Ocean.

This trade which brought ship-loads of gold to their market place compelled native rulers to extend to the traders all facilities. This had become such a great tradition by the time of Sulayman (351 A.D.) that "the people believed that the longevity of their kings (Balhara) and prosperity of the kingdom was due to their love for the Arabs". Masudi (943-955) adds "Islam is therefore

\[\text{14. S. Maqbul Ahmad, } \textit{Indo-Arab Relations}, \text{ p. 87.}\]
flourishing in his country". Though Masudi makes this statement in connection with the Balhara other Arab geographers have mentioned the flourishing Muslim communities on the Malabar coast where "None but Muslims ruled over them". The grants to Mar Sapir Iso and Joseph Rabban to which reference has already been made were the expressions of the warm welcome extended by the rulers. The tomb stone at Pantalayani, Kollam dated 166 Hijra (784 A.D.) in the grave yard of a big Masjid is testimony of an earliest Muslim settlement on Malabar coast. C.N. Ahammad Moulavi has mentioned that he had seen at Ulkkalur, an ancient Marapila village in Cannanore district a tomb-stone bearing the date 50 A.H. But 20 years after he could not trace it as the area had been subjected to floods. The discovery of four gold coins of the Umayyad period in Kothamanjalam village is a clear indication of the Muslim interior trade prior to 750 A.D., which again proves the possibility of settled Muslim trading communities along the coast. These traders


16. It was an important port on the Malabar coast between Muziris and Konkan coast prior to the rise of Calicut. It is the Pantalains of the Chinese, Pandaraina of Idrisi and Ibn Battuta, Pandarini of the Portuguese, and Sandinains of Abdulrazzack and possibly Patate of Pliny-present-day Quilandi, 13 miles north of Calicut.

17. Kothamanjalam lies in the interior Malabar at the foot a mountain pass.
themselves came with the message of Islam to the caste-
ridden society, with ship-loads of gold and with the
prestige of Islamic civilization and as the subjects of
the most powerful ruler on earth. 13

The local tradition regarding the introduction
of Islam into Kerala is contained in the Keralolpatti
(Origin of Kerala). It states that Ceraman Perumal, the
last Perumal ruler of Kerala, who was a convert to Islam,
partitioned his empire and went to Mecca. He died on his
way back from Mecca after visiting Prophet Muhammad and
was buried on the Arabian coast. According to another
tradition it was in commemoration of the partitioning of
the kingdom that the 'Kollam Era' was started in 824-85 A.D. 19

The earliest recorded version of this tradition is found
in the accounts of Duarte Barbosa and Barros. Barbosa
(c.1515 A.D.) concludes his narrative thus: "He (Ceraman
Perumal) went in their (the Moors) company to the house
of Mecca and there he died, or as it seems probable on
the way thither; for the Malabares never more heard any

13. Arabs counted the most powerful kings of the world
in the following order: 1. Caliph, 2. Byzantine
Velayudhan Panikkasser, Randu Keralolpattikal
(Mal.), pp. 17, 25, 29.
tidings of him. Before he started the king divided his kingdom among his kinsfolk into several portions as it yet is, for before that time all Malabar was one kingdom. Barros gives a similar account. "Sarama Pereimal, which king was so powerful that in memory of his name they used to make a reckoning of the period of his reign... making it the starting point of an era... In his time the Arabs now converted to the sect of Muhammad began to trade with India.... When they were settled in the country this king Sarama Pereimal became a Moore and showed them great favour.... Thus they persuaded him that for his salvation he ought to end his life at the house of Mecha. He agreed.... and determined to make a partition of his state among his nearest kindred". Shaykh Zayn ud-din also gives a similar account. He says that a party of Muslim faqirs with a Shaykh started on a pilgrimage to Adam's foot in Ceylon and landed in Kodungallur. From this party the ruling king heard of Prophet Muhammad, the tenets of the religion of Islam and the miracle of splitting the moon. "Allah, glory be to Him, and exalted be He, had caused to enter

21. Shaykh Zayn ud-din, the author of Tuhfat ul-Mujahidin, completed in 1573. This is the first written work on Kerala History, by a Keralite.
in his mind the truth of the mission of Prophet, and the
king believed in him". The king then asked the party to
return by his capital and on their arrival he made
arrangements for ruling his kingdom in his absence by
appointing governors for provinces and he left for Mecca
in their company. On his way back he fell ill and died.
He had entrusted letters addressed to his relatives in
Malabar introducing the party who had accompanied him,
asking the rulers to grant them facilities for the propa­
gation of the faith and erection of mosques. The party
led by Malik Ibn-Dinar came to Kodungallur and they
erected ten mosques in different parts of Malabar. 22

The serious chronological discrepancies in the
different versions of the tradition make it difficult
for us to accept it as it is. At the same time such a
persistent tradition as current in the sixteenth and
seventeenth centuries cannot be easily discarded, because
"Christians claim him as one of their early converts, the
Muhammadans as their very first convert on Indian soil.
At the same time the Hindus look upon him as one of their
saints". 23 The mere fact that this tradition was not known

22. 'Tuhfat', pp. 35-40.
23. K.V. Krishna Ayyar, Cheraman Perumal - a new study,
I, 9. Bharatha Kaumudi (Quoted in P.A.S. Raja,
Medieval Kerala, p. 5).
to Ibn Battuta who had visited Malabar several times, is not a good and sufficient reason to reject it. In fact he had heard of the conversion of a former ruler\textsuperscript{24} in Danfattan. Often Sulayman's statement, "I know not there is anyone of either nation (Chinese and Indian) that has embraced Islam or speak Arabic" is quoted against this tradition to show that Islam did not enter India till 851 A.D. As Nainar has stated Sulaiman's date cannot be taken as 851 A.D. as it is the sum total of Arab knowledge of India prior to 851 and it cannot be ascertained precisely in which period Sulaiman makes this statement.\textsuperscript{25} Therefore it will not be useful to establish any theory on the strength of Sulaiman's statement.

The different versions give three different periods for the introduction of Islam into Kerala and for the Perumal's conversion.

1. During the life-time of Prophet (between 622-633 A.D.)

2. During the Eighth century

\textsuperscript{24} Adjacent to a Jama at mosque in Dharmadam in Northern Kerala, he had seen a very big tank with comfortable bathroom and staircase leading to the mosque so that people could perform ablution and take their bath. "Husain the Jurist told me that he who had built the mosque as well as the bath was one of the ancestors of Kuwayl (the ruler) that had been a Muslim and that there was a remarkable story concerning his conversion." Mahdi Husain, Rehla of Ibn Battuta, p. 197.

\textsuperscript{25} S.M.H. Nainar, Arab Geographers' Knowledge of South India, p. 108.
3. During the Nineth century.

This tradition that Islam spread in Kerala during the lifetime of Prophet is probably true. As has been pointed out, Arab sailors and merchants who were trading with Kerala at that time must have been the first converts to Islam. Therefore, it stands to reason to believe that Islam spread in Kerala along with its introduction in Arabia, especially in the trade settlements. But to believe that a Perumal of Kerala believed in Islam and went to Arabia, met the Prophet and was converted at his hands is a different matter. As minute details of the Prophet's life and activities have been meticulously recorded, one can be fairly certain that if a well-known king of Malabar (Kerala) had visited the Prophet it would not have escaped mention in the vast Hadith literature.

The second tradition is that the introduction of Islam into Kerala and the conversion of the Perumal took place in the eighth century A.D. There is circumstantial evidence supporting this possibility. The earliest reference we get in the form of inscriptions to prove the presence of Muslims in Malabar is a tombstone in an ancient grave yard at Pantalayini Kollam dated 166 Hijrah (782 A.D.). It reads: "Ali Ibn-Udthorman was obliged to leave this world for ever to the one which
is everlasting, and which receives the spirits of all, in the year 166 Hijrah (782 A.D.), so called after Muhammad the Prophet left for Madina. Though the dating of this inscription was questioned by Dr. Burgess who thought that it could not be earlier than the fourteenth century, as Logan concluded it is possible that the tombstone was erected at a later date to commemorate the traditional burial place of the Arabian pioneer. The existence of a group of similar tombstones at Pantalayini Kollam testifies to the existence of a settled colony of Muslims in that place.

The conquest of Sind by Muhammad ibn Qasim soon after 710 A.D. gave the Arabs the valuable ports of Daybul and Mansurah which brought them a stage nearer to the far east. Before the end of Umayyad caliphate (749) some Shia Muslims fleeing from the persecution in Khurasan had settled on an island in one of the large rivers of China, opposite a port. Al-Marwazi had recorded that the community was still in existence about 1120 A.D. and acted as middlemen in the trade between Chinese and foreigners.

753 A.D. the Caliph's subjects were powerful enough to sack and burn the city of Canton.29

The cause of Hajjaj's attack of Sind as recorded by Baladhuri itself proves the existence of a Muslim settlement in Ceylon prior to 710 A.D. The immigration of Nawayats either "at the end of the seventh century or in the beginning of the eighth century A.D."20 to the Camara coast further strengthens the possibility of the existence of Muslim colonies on the Malabar coast at an earlier date. The learned scholar C.N. Ahamed Moulaavi has recorded that he had seen a tombstone dated 50 A.H. in a graveyard at Irikkur near the ancient Muslim settlement of Valappattanam in Cannanore District, but that after twenty-one years when A.E. Miller and himself

29. S. Maqbul Ahmad, Indo-Arab Relations, p. 11. It was reported that the widows and children of some Muslim merchants who had died in Ceylon were repatriated by the king of Ceylon to their native country. The ship carrying them was attacked by the pirates of Debal, off the coast of Sind. Hajjaj Ibn Yusuf's appeal to the ruler of Sind to chastise the pirates fell on deaf ears. Thereupon Hajjaj sent his commander, Muhammed Ibn Qasim, to conquer Sind (712 A.D.). (Baladhuri, Futuhul Balad in Elliot and Dowson, History of India as told by its own Historians, Vol. I, p. 118).

tried to take a photograph, the tombstone could not be traced because the whole graveyard was affected by floods.31

The presence of a powerful Muslim group, whose importance was recognised by the government of the country is proved by the 'Tharisappalli Copper Plates' (349 A.D.) granted with the approval of Emperor Sthanu Ravi in his fifth regnal year to the Syrian Christian merchant-chieftain Mar Sapir Iso. The fact that the copper plates are attested by some Muslims, probably merchants, goes to prove their influence in the political set-up of the country, which further establishes their long contact and flourishing condition from an earlier date.32

Shaykh Zayn ud-din writing towards the close of sixteenth century (1573) on the first appearance of Islam in Kerala supports the view of the introduction of Islam in Kerala in the ninth century. He says, "As

32. The attestation to the copper plates in the Kufic script reads: "And witness to this Maimun son of Ibrahim and witness Mohammad son of Mani and witness Salih son of Ali and witness 'Uthman son of Al-Marsiban and witness Muhammad Bakir son of Is and Ismail son of Yakub". Syed Mohideen Shah, Islam in Kerala, pp. 13-14.
for the exact date there is no certain information with us; most probably it might have been two hundred years after Hijrah (822 A.D.) of the Prophet". 33

The question then arises whether the advent of Islam in Kerala was related to the conversion and emigration of the Perumal. Ibn Battuta has recorded the tradition of one of the ancestors of the king of Kottayam called 'Kuwayl' who was converted to Islam. 34 Though the statement is obscure, it is possible that perhaps the ancestor referred to here may have been a Perumal, ruler of Kerala. Hence it cannot be argued that the Perumal legend was totally unknown to the Moroccan traveller. As Dr. M.G.S. Narayanan points out "There is no reason to reject the tradition that the last Cera king embraced Islam and went to Mecca since it finds a place not only in Muslim chronicles, but also in Hindu Brahminical chronicles, like Keralalpatti, which need not be expected to concoct such a story which in no way serves to enhance the prestige or further the interests of the Brahmin or Hindu population". 35 But the

33. Tuhfat, p. 39.
34. Mahdi Husain, op. cit., p. 187.
35. M.G.S. Narayanan, "Political and Social Condition in Kerala under the Kulasekhara Empire" (Unpublished Thesis submitted for Ph.D. in Kerala University, (1972), pp. 185-90.
tradition that he partitioned his empire in 824-25 A.D. (which is also the starting year of Kollam Era) cannot be accepted because a united kingdom flourished in Kerala from 800-1122 A.D. It has also to be noted that the provincial chieftains (Muduvallis) had been very powerful in the kingdom even when the centralised monarchy existed. We find the proof of their importance in their attestation of the grants by ruling kings to the merchants. If we associate the tradition of the division of Kerala into several principalities with the conversion and emigration of the last Perumal, it might have happened only by the beginning of the twelfth century A.D. Three circumstances support this argument.

1. The tradition relating to the last Perumal's body-guards being designated as Onnum Kura Ayiram (Thousand soldiers less one).


3. The Malayalam Proverb 'Torru Toppiyittu' (Defeated and converted).

The last Perumal, Rama Kulasekhara, is believed to have disappeared under strange circumstances in 1121 A.D., which prevented the nomination of another leader. Hence his bodyguard came to be known as Ōnum Kura Ayiram (one thousand less one). The above-mentioned Matayi mosque is one of the ten mosques believed to have been erected by Malik Ibn Dinar and his party. This would mean that the mosque was erected two years after the departure of the Cereman Perumal to Mecca. The two year gap between his departure (1121 A.D.) and the erection of the mosque (1123 A.D.) is sufficient period for the party who had accompanied him on his return journey to come to Malabar and establish the mosques. In the tradition as recorded by Zayn ud-din, Madayi mosque is the third mosque established by the missionary group in Malabar, the Kodungallur and Kulam (Southern Kollam) mosques being the first and second respectively. But another shortcoming in this argument is to be noted again, that Zayn-ud-din says that it was many years after Perumal's death that the Malik Dinar Missionary group sailed for Malabar.

37. "Then the King died.... many years after this Sharaf Ibn Malik, Malik Ibn Dinar, Malik Ibn Habib and his wife Qamarlyya and others with their children and dependants set sail for Malabar in a ship and arrived off Kodungallur", Tuhfat, p. 33.
Historians have so far neglected one important factor in this tradition, namely the missionary group under Malik ibn Dinar. To sum up this tradition from various sources, the group landed at Kodungallur with Perumal's letter. The ruling chieftains accorded them a warm welcome and eventually this group founded ten mosques in different parts of Malabar. After entrusting these mosques to reliable disciples, Malik Ibn Dinar left Quilon for Shahr Muqalla. From there he proceeded to Khurasan and died on his way or in Khurasan itself.

To look at this tradition from a different angle brings more chronological confusion. We know only one Malik Ibn Dinar in history. He was Malik Ibn Dinar as Sami who was the son of a Persian slave from Sijistan, and who became a disciple of Hassan of Basrah. He is mentioned as a reliable traditionist transmitting from such early authorities as Anas Ibn Malik and Ibn Sirin. He was a noted calligrapher of the Quran. He died in

39. Ibid., p. 39. Zayn-ud-din says that he died in Khurasan while Umar Suhravardi, the author of Bihat al-Muluk, holds the view that he died at Kasargod. T. Ubaid, Hasarat Malik Ibn Dinar (Mal.), p. 17; also P.A. Syed Mohammad, Kerala Muslim Charithram (Mal.), pp. 57-63.
748 A.D. (c.130 A.H.). One thing is thus proved beyond doubt that Perumal did not meet the Prophet as Zayn ud-din stated. The second argument that Perumal went to Mecca in 8th century is probable, though we have established it to be in 1121 A.D. earlier in this chapter. The nature of the tradition suggests that the story is a later fabrication around the known personalities of history. Stories of kings who converted to Islam was current in the East in other countries as well. It becomes also clear as the names indicate that men of this missionary group were Persians, as they came from Basra. As S.D. Goitein observed, "the very expansion of Islam was largely the work of non-Arab peoples". Persian influence on Mappila Muslims is evident from the use of the words like Bank, Mulla, Shirni, Sabeena, Hislam Kallu, and others.

The fact that the missionary group was able to establish ten mosques along the Malabar coast in two and

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41. S.D. Goitein, Studies in Islamic History and Institutions, p. 10.
42. Adhan, Call for prayer.
43. The man who teaches Quran.
44. Sweet dishes.
45. Pious songs sung in nights.
46. The stones placed at the head and foot of a Qabar.
half years proves beyond doubt that there had already
been settled communities of Muslims in these places.
The letter of the Perumal to the local rulers helped
them to obtain a warm reception and also facilities to
erect mosques. But this had been the case even prior
to the conversion of the Perumal. The Arab geographers
repeatedly speak of kings who had been very kind to the
Muslims. In the eighth and ninth centuries, as
Buddhism and Jainism were on the retreat, and as
Brahminism had not exerted its domination, there was suf-
ficient laxity in the social life of Malabar for the
introduction and assimilation of the new creed. The
welcome given by the rulers to the traders is proved by
the munificent grants to the merchant princes.

Describing the rapid growth of Islam in Kerala Zayn ud-din
says: "Allah, glory be to Him, and exalted be He, made
the faith of Islam spread in most of the inhabited regions

47. Refer to Arab geographer's statement on Balhara,
'The king of King's whose people believed that the
longevity of their king was due to their favour
shown to Muslims. S.M.H. Nainar, Arab Geographers:
Knowledge of South India, pp. 153-67.

48. Copper Plate grants to Joseph Rabban, and Mar Sapir
Iso (The Christian Merchant). For a detailed dis-
cussion on the significance of these grants, vide,
M.G.S. Narayanan, Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala,
pp. 23-37.
of the earth. Allah has been gracious to the people of Malabar in Hind in making them accept the faith of Islam spontaneously and willingly, and not out of fear or compulsion. Thus Islam took roots and its adherents increased in number. The Muslims steadily increased in number by immigration and proselytisation. Traders from different parts of the world began to flock to the coastal towns and new inland as well coastal centres developed. The rulers received them well because they found in these caliph's subjects a substitute for the Syrian Christians and Jews whose international influence was waning. Zayn ud-din says: "The rulers have respect and regard for the Muslims, because the increase in the number of cities was due to them. Hence the rulers enable the Muslims in the observation of their Friday prayers and celebration of Id. They fix allowances for Qasids and muadhins and entrust them with the duty of carrying out the laws of Shariat. No one is permitted to neglect the mass prayers on Fridays. In greater part of Malabar, whoever neglects it, is punished or made to pay a fine. The rulers take from the Muslims only a tenth part of the income of their trade..... They do not levy

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49. Tubbat, p. 12.
tax on those who possess lands or fruit gardens although they are of vast extent. As a result of such kindly treatment the Muslim merchants of olden days used to come in large numbers.

Ibn-Battuta who spent two years (1345-47 A.D.) in Malabar found several prosperous Muslim settlements in different parts of the Northern and Central Kerala, patronised by their rulers on account of their 'need for the merchants'. He found that "Muslims were most highly honoured amongst them (the Hindus) except that they do not eat with them or allow them into their houses".

The most important factor in the growth of Muslim influence in Kerala was the support given by the Zamorins of Calicut. Three factors of mutual interest had combined to form this attitude.

1. The great prosperity that the traders brought and the "increase in number of cities" in his country.

2. The financial support and manual assistance these traders gave him in fulfilling his political ambitions.

3. The trade interest of Calicut, for the Muslims made the Zamorin a vital link in the chain of Moorish

powers from Cordova in Western Europe to Malacca in the Far East.

According to tradition, it was the Calicut Koya who recommended to the Zamorin the conquest of Valluvanad in order to acquire the custodianship of the Namankam festival of Tirunavay. The financial and military support provided by the Muslims helped the Zamorin to extend his sway over Valluvanad. The Zamorin had even issued an order that one or more male members of every fishermen family should be brought up as Muslims. This helped in the largescale conversion of fishermen community now known as 'pusalans', evidently a corruption of 'Pudu Islam' (New Islam) and enabled an adequate supply of manpower to man his navy and sea trade, because the Hindus were averse to sea and sea-trade, and left such 'vulgar' professions either to the lower castes or to the foreigners. It was his Muslim Admirals, the 'Kunnali Marakkars' who captained his navy in his prolonged wars with the Portuguese and the Muslim settlement of Ponnani for long served as his naval base and chief arsenal, while on the land Muslim recruits provided additional loyal

51. M.G.S. Narayanan, Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala, p. 33.
forces to supplement his traditionally militant but unstable Muyar fighters for his policy of aggrandizement.\textsuperscript{53}

The Zamorins amply reciprocated the services of the Muslims. As Zaynuddin had noted he offered fixed allowance of Qa'is and Muadhins. A thirteenth century inscription in a mosque in Calicut has been recently discovered registering a land gift for the custodian of the Mosque for his maintenance.\textsuperscript{54} The history of Ba Alavi Saints shows his patronage to them and to all other saints. "His love for the Muslims and respect for them especially for those who come from far-off lands" has been lauded by Shaikh Zayn ud-din.\textsuperscript{55} The Muslims were given monopoly of import and export trade. The office of the 'Port Commissioner' was given to them with the title, 'Sabantra Koya'.\textsuperscript{56} Kunnalis were his naval captains. After the coronation ceremony, the Zamorins used to receive Betel leaf from a Muslim dressed as a lady of a certain family.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{53} R.E. Miller, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 17.
\item \textsuperscript{54} The Bilingual Inscription in the Muccunti mosque in Calicut registers one Nali (a measure) of rice for the maintenance of the mosque and land was set apart in Kunnemangalam and Pallikkal villages (areas some 10-15 miles from Calicut to north and east). M.G.S. Narayanan, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 38-42.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Tuhfat, p. 41.
\item \textsuperscript{56} The original word was 'Shah bandar Khwaja'.
\end{itemize}
"The Muhammadan Qazi or Judge, Sabantra Koya or farmer of port dues, Tura Marakkayar or chief pilot and the 'Palli Musaliyar' or elder in charge of the mosque should be at the Jetty for Akampati (escort) in the coronation procession", writes the historian of the Zamorins. But the greatest honour was the right of Kolikottu Koya (The Muslim chieftain of Calicut) to stand on the right side of Zamorin in the prestigious 'Mamamkam' festival. The Muslims not only made Calicut the greatest port of the West-Coast of India: they even helped to spread the name and fame of the Zamorin to Europe where he was known as a Moorish prince. Calicut thus became the meeting place of nations. Such security and justice reigned in the city that Abd al-Razzaq (1142) noted that "large bundles of goods off loaded from the ships could be left on the streets for any length of time without guard and without threat of theft". These trade prospects attracted the Chinese traders also and by the time of Ibn Battuta Calicut, where he found large Chinese Junks, had become the last port on Malabar coast which the Chinese ships had visited.

58. Ibid., p. 104. The great festival held at Tirunavay once in twelve years.
The establishment of Arakkal Swarupam of Cannanore was an event that greatly influenced the growth of the community in North Malabar. By twelfth century the influence of the Ali Rajas of Arakkal (often called Arakkal Svarupam) had increased so much that the Kolattiris (The Rajas who held sway in North Kerala) were induced to seek their help by bestowing Laccadive Islands on them. As Tom Pires remarked "Had the Portuguese not taken over the city (Cannanore) it would have fallen to Muhammad Ali and the Moors".59

Farther north, in the kingdom of "Elil Mala" also Muslims were honourably treated. In the 'Musakavamsakavya', an eleventh century Sanskrit work, there are references to the foundation of two cities of Marahi (Madayi) and Vallabhapattanam (Valapattanam), "where merchants from distant islands were settled for trade".60 These two cities and surrounding areas became important Muslim centres. Valapattanam, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries became an important centre of Islamic learning and numerous Tarigas and Shaykhs flourished there as will be discussed in the coming chapters. Atula, the court

poet and chronicler of Musaka king, Srikantha (11th century),
described the religious harmony of his capital as different
deities co-existing "in peace like wild beasts forergettlng
their natural animosity in the vicinity of a holy
hermitage".  

The support of the native rulers encouraged large-
scale conversion to Islam. People of lower castes who
were suffering from the cruel inhibitions of the Hindu
caste system came forward in large numbers to embrace the
new religion. The out-castes found, in the conversion
to Islam a refuge. When shame and disgrace fell upon
somebody, he converted himself. Thurston observes:
"In the heat of a family quarrel, in moment of despair,
a Hindu thought to revenge himself and upon his family
by becoming a convert to Islam. But once in Islam, there
was no question of going back to his religion and be a
renegade to be killed by the Mappilas". William Logan,
the Malabar Collector observed in 1381: "The honour of
Islam once conferred on a Cheruman (scheduled caste of
Kerala) or any one of the lower caste he moves at one

61. Musakavamsa Kavya as quoted in M. J. S. Narayanan,
Cultural Symbiosis, Introduction, p. 11.
62. A Proverb in Malayalam runs 'Torru Toppiyittu',
which means defeated and converted.
63. E. Thurston, Castes and Tribes of South India,
Madras (1909), IV, pp. 458-60.
spring several places higher socially than that which he originally occupied and the figures corroborating what has been actually observed in the district show that nearly fifty thousand Cherumars and other Hindus have availed themselves of the opening. The new converts were given clothes and robes by the Muslims. Zayn ud-din observed: "The unbelievers never punish such of their countrymen who embrace Islam but treat them with the same respect shown to the rest of Muslims though the convert belongs to the lowest of the grades of their society". As Montgomery Watt observed "better economic prospect" also 'had profound influence on religious movements" since, as a trading community Mappilas could move freely with their merchandise and were less taxed. Moreover in Calicut as well as in other parts of Malabar, as noticed by Ibn Battuta, almost all men related to sea trade were Muslims.

In Quilon in South Kerala where Malik Ibn Dinar had erected one of his ten mosques, the Muslim trading community had acquired such prominence in the political set up of the country that they were cited as witnesses to the Tarisappalli Copper Plate Grant made by Ayyan Atikal

64. W. Logan, Malabar, I, p. 197.
65. Tuhfat, p. 52.
Tiruvatikal, Governor of Venad (849 A.D.). 66 The cavalry wing of the king was chiefly manned by them.

The community as has been described by Abul Fida (1273-1331), Marco Polo (c.1293), Abdul Razzaq (1442) and best of all by Ibn-Battuta (1304-1369) grew in number by 1583 to form ten percent of the population. 67 But the importance of these people in the political and economic affairs of the country was far more than what their smaller number would suggest. Ibn Battuta found Muslim merchants and Muslim houses in most of the districts of Northern and Central Kerala. At Mangalore, on the northern fringe of Mappila area, he noticed a settlement of 4000 people originated from Fars and Yemen. Travelling south, he noticed Muslim colonies with big Jamaath mosques at Hill (Madayi), Ballyappattam, and Pantalayini Kollam. His difficulty in obtaining food due to caste pollution was overcome by the large number of Muslim houses on the way: "Were it not for them no Muslims could travel". Nevertheless he experienced friendly welcome from the Hindus. "Muslims are most highly honoured amongst them.... except that they do not eat with them or allow them to

66. M.G.S. Narayanan, Cultural Symbiosis, pp. 31-37.
67. Barbosa (1500-1516) noticed only the coastal settlement of Muslims and was mistaken by the presence of large number of Muslims in the trading centres which he estimated as forming one fifth of the population of Malabar.
their houses*. At Calicut, he was amazed by the splendour and pomp, while at Quilon he was struck by the greatness of the Jamaath mosque.

The peaceful assimilation and rapid growth of the community on Malabar coast are sufficient temptations for a student of history to analyse the various factors that contributed to these developments. The social status and royal patronage of the early traders were aspects of great significance. They lived in separate quarters with virtual autonomy, something which may be the earliest form of extra-territorial rights. They lived with least interference in the society and their economic interests were never in conflict with the agrarian economy of the natives. Instead they provided ready market for the agricultural products and cash crops. Trade and industry flourished with them, and new cities sprang up all along the coast. The unprecedented development of cities may rightly be called an urban revolution, which is ascertained in Zayn ud-din’s statement. Though we have no statistical data of the income of these Rajas, the nature of conquest and consolidation of powerful Rajas

68. Judaism and Christianity too were introduced into Malabar by trading communities who were patronised by native rulers, for which reference has already been made.

69. "The rulers have respect and regard for the Muslims, because the increase in the number of cities was due to them". *ubfat*, p. 51.
would reveal their loose hold and consequent rights on land. Zamorin himself who by the time of the arrival of Portuguese had exercised overlordship all over northern Kerala including Cochin had innumerable conquered territories under him, but the rulers were allowed to continue, provided they agreed to pay some tribute or to forfeit certain rights. "Whenever the Samuri fights against any of the weak chieftains for some reason or other and subdues him, he would give him some property or a portion of the territory". Zayn ud-din also adds that it was "because of the regard of the people of Malabar for old customs". When he was defeated the Raja of Cochin ceded to Zamorin Munchira Mukkatam and certain rights in the temples of Trivandrum and Chengannur. Again when the Kolattiri was defeated, he was compelled to cede to the Zamorin certain 'Halkoyma' rights over the Taliparamba temple. Such acts were just recognitions of sovereignty and they were virtual liabilities than assets. Except from the 'Cerikkals' (lands which were personal property of the kings) the income from land in the form of land revenue was

70. Ibid., p. 41.
71. K.V. Krishna Ayyar, A History of Kerala, p. 178. He also agreed to send a flag with an offering to Tirunavay for the 'Mamankam'.
insignificant. Thus all these Rajas to a great extent depended on duties on trade and transit. These two rights were considered exclusive rights of sovereigns. As for the rate of customs duties Zayn ud-din says "The rulers take from the Muslims, only a tenth part of the income of their trade, and realise also the penalties, whenever they do anything calling for a penalty".

Ibn-Battuta noted a flourishing Muslim community numbering 4000 with settlers from Fars and Yemen under the royal patronage 'on account of the King's need of the merchants'. This 'need of merchants' was the motive behind befriending Muslims who now substituted the Jews and Christians in international trade providing direct access to Baghdad and opening vast markets in the Islamic empire, as well the great boon to transit trade to Europe.

The Muslims in turn supplied men and money for various schemes of conquest of the Zamorin. His navy was entirely manned by them. In order to enable ample a

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72. In connection with land under the possession of Muslims Zayn ud-din says "They do not levy any tax on those who possess lands or fruit gardens although they are of vast extent". Tuhfat, p. 52.

73. Even when Vasco da Gama wanted permission to leave the port in 1499 after his transactions, the Zamorin demanded customs duties and detained the factor. K.V. Krishna Ayyar, The Zamorins of Calicut, p. 148.

74. Zayn ud-din, Tuhfat, p. 52.

supply of men to man his navy and sea-trade, the Zamorin
issued a royal decree, that one male member of every
fishermen family should be brought up as Muslim. Not
only that, "the Zamorin induced them", writes the historian
of the Zamorins of Calicut "by special concessions to
visit his new town and settle there." They were not only
given freedom to convert the people to their faith, they
were also given the monopoly of import and export trade. Muslim fighters supplemented the irregular Nayar forces
of the Zamorin, and the conquest of Tirunay, the site
of the most prestigious Mamankam, was planned and executed by Kolikkottu Koya. The conquests thus carried on enabled
him to claim such titles as "Kunnalakkonatiri" (The Lord
of hills and waves).

Social disabilities of lower castes and restrictions imposed on non-caste people were the most important


78. As an expression of his gratitude the Zamorin gave the Koya the privilege to stand on the right side of Zamorin during the Mamankam festival. This was considered a very high honour, for a Muslim historian in sixteenth century (1573 A.D.) counted it first among the favours of the Zamorin. Qazi Mohammad, *Fath ul Nabaw*, p. 242.
reasons for conversions. But Islam came into contact with these people in the interior in the later centuries when Portuguese depredations on the coastal settlements and loss of export trade compelled them to move in to the interior. During the period from sixteenth century the Sufi Missionary activities in the interior settlements became very active. In these settlements, wherein the Mappilas, hitherto traders confined to coastal trade emporiums, came into contact with agricultural labourers and non-caste peoples. The Mappilas themselves had to be contented with the status of tenants and landless labourers because in the traditional agrarian system ownership of land was 'Jenma' or birth-right of the privileged classes. Thus the 'Vasco da Gama epoch' was a period of retrogression and economic decline for the community but it opened up new horizons for the propagation of the faith.

There were many causes for the community's ranks to swell. The children of the union between Arab Muslims and local women were brought up as Muslims.  

79. A detailed discussion of the topic is made in Chapter II.  
The Arab short-time marriage called 'Muta marriages' are still in practice in some of the coastal cities of Kerala. Many of these also had accepted Islam. T.W. Arnold has discussed in detail the propagation of the Muslim faith in Malabar and the causes of conversion. The out-castes which were too many due to the rigorous restrictions of caste system found a ready refuge from its clutches by the acceptance in Islam. Francis Buchanan has given a description of out castes and convicts being sold to the Mappilas. "A Nair man who is found in fornication with a shanar is put to death and the woman is sold to the Meplays". "A Namburi who condescended to commit fornication would formally have been deprived of his eyes, and the girl and all her relatives would either have been put to death or sold as slaves to the Meplays who send them beyond the sea, a banishment dreadful to every Hindu and still more to the native of Malabar who is more attached to his native spot than any other person I knew". W. Logan records that Hindu youth would avenge himself and his family by converting to Islam.

84. Ibid., p. 739.
Better economic advantages and scope of employment and the consequent change in social status were other attractions to converts. The rise of innumerable urban centres opened new scope for employment. The brisk trade activities required the manual service in the form of accountants, helpers, watchmen, porters, and servants. There was an unlimited demand for servants in the royal service as well, for it is said that the Zamorin used to appoint one accountant and helper and other servants to every merchant when he landed in Calicut. The unbounded generosity and hospitality of this king again must have required a good number of royal 'slaves'. Abdurazzack tells us of the manner how a bifitting residence was allotted to him and royal provisions were sent and servants assigned. These servants could not have been Nairs since they were bound to pollute their persons in so closely mingling with the flesh and fish-eating foreigners. The royal hospitality alone provided demand for manual labour as servants of different level and status.

The demand for seamen has been noted by travellers and to enable an adequate supply of man power for the Zamorin's navy, and sea-trade he had made a Royal decree to bring up one member every fishermen family as Muslim. 36

36. "The Brahmin-ashatriya prejudice against trade and navigation also induced them to leave such 'vulgar' affairs in the hands of foreigners", M.G.S. Narayanan, Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala, Trivandrum (1972). p. 5.
A lot of labour was in demand as porters. Carts and carriages were not in use as late as 19th century. The reason was the absence of good roads. Carts could not be used due to innumerable rivers in fury half the year and with their steep banks in the summer. Ibn Battuta testifies how only men were used to carry goods and not even bullock carts. Buchanan also testifies to the fact. As late as 1808 after annexation by English we see A British Official describing "the pitiable condition of roads in Malabar". This would mean that not only in the ports but all along the coastal routes men could come into close contact with Muslim traders.

Many of these people had to move to the cities to find job opportunities in the various ways as already noted. But the Hindu Law-givers had an aversion to city life. According to Gotama there is a perpetual an-adyaya (non-recital of Vedas) in the city. Apastamba has a similar injunction. So also Vasistha and Manu. Apastamba forbids a snataka (pious householder who has completed

37. 'In Malabar even cattle are little used for the transportation of goods, which are generally carried by porters'. F. Buchanan, Journey through Mysore, Canara and Madras, p. 741.

his studies as a brahmachari) to enter the city. Baudhayana makes it very clear by declaring that nobody living in the city, with his body covered with the dust of the city and his eyes and mouth filled with it can attain salvation even if he leads an austere life. Anyhow 'apad-dharma' (emergency) relaxation were permitted, which could permit any means of livelihood. But many of them were looked down upon by the luckier ones.

The Brahmins in Kerala society were at the apex, followed by the Nayars, and they formed the gentry. In the agrarian structure Brahmins were landlords, the Nayars kanakkar or tenants, and Ilavas formed agricultural labourers. There was no relevance for Brahmins and Nayars moving to the cities. In the case Parayas and Pulayas they were by birth bound to the land. They could be bought and sold with the land and were destined to work and die on the same soil whoever be their master. Moreover in the early stages of its growth confined to the port towns there was no possibility of the Muslim community coming into contact with these people who lived deep in the interiors away from the settlements of caste Hindus.

89. Ibid., p. 53. (Apasthamba, Dharma-sutra 1, 11, 21, 32).
90. A. Gosh, The City in Early Historical India, p. 53.
The Chogans or Ilavas of Malabar were people who migrated from Ceylon (Ilam) as their name indicates. These people were traditional toddy tappers, and men who plucked coconuts. They had no role in the land-owning system except as agricultural labourers. They were naturally settled along the coastal regions with coconut plantation and as such provided manual labour as porters and came into contact with Muslims. In the caste hierarchy they stood just below Nayars and could move more easily to the cities. Naturally in Malabar they came under the pale of Islam. It is a startling discovery during the course of the field work that even today in Calicut a non-Muslim is invariably referred to as 'Thiyyan'. That was why in North Malabar the Muslims were influenced by concepts like Illam, Kulam and Kiriyam, common among the Ilavas. The field work conducted for this study in the case of Muslim and Ilava Ornaments revealed striking similarity which again shows large-scale conversions from Ilavas.91

As A.H. Klausen observed: "When a lower caste person wants to improve his economic position he very often does so by breaking off his connections with the native

91. The present writer is deeply indebted to K.H. Mohamed, Archaeologist, A.M.U. Aligarh for the help, given in the comparative study of ornaments.
home, village, and his caste kindred. Such people got jobs in the city milieu and very often got a new occupation not represented in the traditional caste system. Thus he entered a milieu where representatives of many castes lived side by side in a new employment situation and where caste attachment will not therefore impose subordination to any one.

This movement of people in search of job to the trade centres helped the "increase in number of cities" with the help of merchants whom the "kings were in need of". In every sense it was Asian mode of urbanization. Thus Muslims at least in small degree caused occupational diversification and non-caste economy, and the multifarious economic changes helped the growth of individualism, the greatest trait of Malayali character.

93. "The rapid rate of urbanization visible in Asian countries does not bespeak of a corresponding growth of industry, but a shift of people from low productive agricultural employment to yet another section marked by low productivity employment, namely handicraft production, retail trading, domestic services in urban areas". M.V. Sevani, Urbanization and Urban India, Bombay (1966), p. 7.