

CHAPTER 2

LAND AND PEOPLE

Writing local history specifying well defined geographical entity is neither possible nor desirable. For one thing even in the administrative sense today there are at least eight administrative territorial divisions, which carry the name Chengannur – Chengannur Revenue Sub Division, Chengannur Revenue Taluk, Chengannur Town, Chengannur Village, Chengannur Panchayat, Chengannur Development Block, Chengannur Assembly Constituency and Chengannur Parliament Constituency, none of which are geographically either co-terminus or stable over time in terms of their inclusiveness. Secondly over a long period of history, events, with their influences and impact, happened not confined to the territory defined by any of the classifications of today. Therefore this study has chosen to have the historical region of Chengannur rather loosely defined. However, it can be said that Chengannur for the purpose of intensive study encompasses a region spread around the nucleus of the Chengannur Township. The Chengannur historical region so chosen for focused and intensive search in this study conforms almost to the geographical area of the Chengannur Taluk of the revenue district of Alleppey. Only two places in the loosely defined historical region fall outside the Chengannur taluk boundary viz. Aranmula now in the Pathanamthitta district in the east and Alamthuruthy in the west near the ancient port of Niranam. Of these, Aranmula is only 9kms. away and, infact, has greater links with Chengannur than with Pathanamthitta. Pathanamthitta District was formed only in 1980 and until then Aranmula was

part of Chengannur Taluk. Alamthuruthy is in the Alleppey district as is Chengannur and is located adjacent to the Chengannur Taluk. Alamthuruthy is near to Niranam as well. The historical influences of Niranam on Chengannur since ancient days cannot be ignored. Infact, Niranam was the port relevant to many of the eastern regions that stretched eastwards beyond Chengannur. The religious and cultural links were also profound. Christianity, ever since St. Thomas came to the port of Niranam, spread from there to many of the interior regions. For a long time Niranam was the centre of the activities of the Malankara Church. Historians have been inferring all along that the port of Nelcynda mentioned in ancient travel accounts is Niranam and the adjacent regions. That area was the venue of a seashore civilization visited by foreigners like Romans. This is supported by the latest discovery¹ during the excavation under the auspices of the State Department of Archaeology in Kadapra and Alamthuruthy bordering with the present day Chengannur Taluk. These places are just 13kms away from Chengannur town. Proximity of such an important port down the centuries in early times must have had profound influence on the life of the people of a vast region around it including the very near Chengannur region. In any case these marginal inclusions of Alamthuruthy and Aranmula have been made only to the extent of their vital historical belongingness to the territory of Chengannur. No elaborate account of these territories is made in this study.

¹ *Indian Express, December, 2007.*

Long distance trade brought about after the discovery in 45 A.D. of Hippalus the wind contributed much to its development as a trade centre in association with its status as a pilgrim centre. Solomon, the king of Hebrews traded with the Indian ports on the Western coast and his main imports were from Kerala. Once in three years came the navy of Tharshish bringing gold and silver. Romans, Arabs and Chinese traded with Kerala from 2000 B.C to A.D. 400. The acidity of pepper attracted the foreigners to this land. The Malabar coast from Gokarnam to Cape Comerin, with its rivers and its inland communication by the lagoons running parallel to the coast line was a convenient destination for the small vessels which crossed from the Arabian or African shore in search of pepper, spices and ivory to be obtained here. The commercial products of Malabar have in ages long even before Christ acquired wide reputation in the leading markets of ancient world and have ever since continued to be a fruitful source of attraction and inspiration to the commercial instincts of civilized nations. After reaching Muziris and the several ports on the Western part of Kerala they entered the interior of Kerala by using rivers, canals and land routes.

The classical Greek geographers Pliny, Ptolemy and the author of Periplus describe the banks of river Baris as one of the principal centres of Roman trade in Malabar where the sea ports of Becare and Nelcynda are located.² Historians infer that Becare is Purakkad and Nelcynda is Niranam of the present times. It may be mentioned that both the ports are said to have been

² Antonio de Gouvea, *Jornado of Alexis de Menezes: A Portuguese Account of 16th Century Malabar* translated and edited by Pius Malekandathil, L.R.C.Publications, Cochin, 2004, P.25.

situated not very far from each other, on the banks of river Baris which scholars are inclined to identify as Pampa. In the first century when Pliny wrote his account Becare was a more convenient port than Muziris which was the ancient name of the port near the present day Kodungallur. Muziris was not a desirable place of call due to incessant threat from pirates from around the neighbourhood and was not well supplied with wares for traffic. Besides the ships had to anchor at a great distance from the shore and the cargoes had to be shipped by employing boats. The district from which pepper was carried down to Becare in canoes was called Cottonaro.

The author of Periplus calls Muziris the principal port of the land and Becare a village where ships laden with pepper from Nelcynda frequently called. Periplus and Pliny's writings and his book spoke of Cottonaro where the pepper of the finest quality grew in abundance. The entire region was lying on the banks of River Pampa and it supplied all the pepper required for export from Becare to foreign countries. By Ptolemy's period Becare and Nelcynda seem to have ceased to be important ports. In Ptolemy's map Becare is marked in the territory of Cheraputra and Nelcynda in the Ay kingdom. While at this time North of Kerala was ruled by the Ezhimala kingdom, the middle by the Chera Kings and the Southern part by the Ay Kings. Muziris or Cragannore was regarded as the first and foremost cultural centre from where the major religions such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism found their way to interior places, the other ports and entry points have enabled the coming of cultural winds from outside. For instance, St. Thomas shored at Niranam as well and preached the Christian gospel in the interior places. According to tradition St Thomas landed

at Muziris in 52 A.D. That is considered as the beginning of Christianity in Kerala. Jews had settled in Kerala mainly at Crangannore and Kochi. Thomas of Cana (in Malayalam Knai Thomman) and a few of his followers came from Persia and started missionary work on a large scale. Islam had arrived in Kerala immediately after the life time of the prophet through Islamic missionaries. Kerala shines as an excellent model for the rest of the world for peaceful co-existence of religions although there were some conflicts among the different communities after the Europeans came here. However, these were limited and settled as and when they arose in particular localities or pockets. None of them assumed such major proportions as to be described as communal conflicts.

The early Jewish and Christian traders came with shiploads of gold and promise of trade to this presumably predominantly Dravidian society which had no naval power and coinage. The interests of trade must have induced harmony in spite of religious and racial differences. Therefore the Christian church established by Marwan Sabir Iso in the 9th century came under the protection of the state and king. The kutipathi or the headman of the settlements gave orders to Ezhavar, Vellalar, Tachar, Vannar etc. to co-operate with the arrived settlers. The inhibition among the Brahmins and Kshatriyas in conducting trade and navigation induced them to leave such 'vulgar' affairs in the hands of others. Thus it was not difficult for the Christians, Jews, Muslims and Chettis as well as Europeans at a later stage, gain entry into the society of Kerala.

GEO-BIO DIVERSITY

Soil in this region has varying fertility status.* Chengannur is a laterite region³ with a few variations; Regions like Alamthuruthy and other western low lying regions like Mannar and Budhanur have sandy loam throughout and they are considered as low land region closely resembling the adjacent upper Kuttanad region. Puliur, Pandanad and Tiruvanvandur come in the middle region and have soil which is sandy loam and clay mud mix. Regions like Mulakuzha, Venmony and Ala come in the eastern part where soil is laterite and clay mud mix. The territory of this region has rocky patches, gentle slopes and level lands.

Laterite is a surface formation. In a hot and wet tropical area which is rich in iron and aluminium laterite soil develops by intensive and long lasting weathering of the underlying parent rock⁴ Laterite consists mainly of minerals kaolinite, goethite, hematite and gibbsite which form in the course of the weathering. Moreover many laterites contain quartz as relatively stable relic mineral from the parent rock. The iron oxides goethite and hematite cause the red brown colour of laterites. Laterites can be as well soft and friable as firm and physically resistant. Hard varieties are sometimes cut in blocks and used as brick stones for house building. Laterisation is economically most important for the formation of laterite ore deposits. The heavy rain and high temperature in Kerala are conducive for laterisation. Laterite soils are rich in nitrogen but very poor in phosphorus and calcium. Towards the eastern side of the laterite region

* *Puliur Panchayat Records*, Krishibhavan, 2002, p20.

³ Kissan Information File.

⁴ Kissan Information File.

the soil is better in potash and low in water holding capacity. Pepper, arecanut, coconut, banana, sugarcane and tapioca are the major crops of the region. The laterite region being usually sloppy they are relatively more affected by soil erosion.

The western portion of Chengannur and the delta region formed by the rivers Pampa, Manimala and Achenkovil have alluvial soil. Alluvial soil is finely layered and is very deep and found close to river banks and natural levees. Alluvial soil is sandy and clayey. It is fertile and is very suitable for crop growing. Alluvial deposits come from rock debris that has been eroded into fine sediments that are subsequently transported by a mountain stream or river to the valley floor. Sediment is carried usually by ephemeral water flow that occurs in humid climate and is subsequently distributed into fan shaped land forms called alluvial fans. Alluvial fans are either wet or dry, depending on climate of the region; humid region have wet alluvial fans and arid region have dry alluvial fans. Paddy and sugarcane are extensively grown in this tract. Paddy cultivation in the region is locally known as 'Mundakan', 'Viruppu' and 'Punja'. The first crop 'viruppu' is sown under dry conditions and subsequently treated as wet crop with the monsoon rains. The second crop 'Mundakan' is transplanted during August-September months. 'Punja' cultivation is undertaken by pumping out the waterlogged fields in the low land. Sugarcane cultivation is done in two seasons. The first crop is cultivated during October - November and second during January - February. In earlier times of the 22000 acres of sugarcane cultivation in Kerala Chengannur had the largest share. But now the cultivation

is carried out only in 40 hectares confined mainly to Tiruvanvundur and Pandanad regions.⁵

Chengannur is situated on the banks of Pampa at the extreme east of Alapuzha district. River Pampa flows through the middle of Chengannur right up to Mannar, one of the westernmost portions of Chengannur. In due course the uncontrolled floods in the river made many diversions. The River that flows through the present Chengannur Taluk originates, as in the case of 43 rivers of Kerala in the Western Ghats, in the east of Kerala and flows westwards to the Arabian Sea. River Pampa is formed when the small rivers Pampa, Kakki, Azhutha, Kallar and Kakkattar are merged. River Pampa initially merges with Kakkiyar after its origin in Peerumedu in the Western Ghats, at a height of 1650 metres, it then flows westward till Udumbu Mala. There it joins with Azhutha and afterwards flows southwest till Perunthenaruvi and westwards till Naranammuzhi and in southeast direction till Perunnadu. There Kakkattar merges with Pampa. Bending southwards it reaches Vadasserikkara where Kallar merges with it. Then the river flows northwest till Ranni, westwards till Kuriannoor, then southwest till Kozhencherry turning again westwards till Pandanadu in Chengannur Taluk. At Pandanadu, the river divides into two. One branch that turns northwest merges with Manimalayar at Neerettupuram. Thereafter it divides into many small rivulets and falls into the Vembanadu lake. Each rivulet is known by a different name e.g. Nedumudiaru, Pallathuruthiaru. The other branch flows west around the Parumala island,

⁵ Interview with the Agricultural Officer at Chengannur.

merges again with Manimalayar at Mannar (Pannai Kadavu), and flowing westwards merges with Achenkovil Aru at Veeyapuram, flows westwards and then north beyond Thakazhi, Champakulam and finally flows into Vembanad lake near Pallathuruthi in Alappuzha district. The total irrigated area is 1976 sq. kms. Pampa is the third longest river of Kerala. Heavy silting during monsoon floods resulted in the formation of small delta plains surrounded by canals. The low lying fields became, in due course, cultivating lands. These places include Perumkulam, Oodakulam, Pandanadu, Tiruvanvandur, Puliur, Budhanur etc. In short Chengannur region existed throughout the reckonable past as an inhabitable location surrounded by land areas of cultivation with huge yield. The crops included paddy, sugarcane, sweet potatoes, vegetables and coconut.

Geographically, Chengannur is a midland region* situated in the south-eastern part of Alapuzha (Alleppey) district.⁶ Chengannur municipal town is located 117 kms. north of Trivandrum on the road to Kottayam. Adjoining places like Mavelikara in the south is 15 km., Thiruvalla in the north 9 km. and Pathanamthitta in the east 23 km. distant from Chengannur town.⁷

The geographical location of Chengannur on the banks of River Pampa had much influenced in shaping her social, cultural, economic and political growth. All along it has been regarded one of the 108 'divya desams' (holy villages) of the Vaishnavites, being known to them as Thiru-Chengannur. It is believed by some that 'Chemkunnur' gradually developed as Chengannur.

⁶ Kerala District Gazetteer, p.174.

* Topographically regions in Kerala are classified as: Malanadu (High lands) in the east, Theera Pradesam (Coastal Land) in the West and Edanadu (Midland) in the middle. Midland regions are located at a height of 7.5 metres above the sea level.

⁷ Babu Raju, Kottayam, *Kerala State Vignjana Kosam*, Kottayam, 2003, p.337.

There is also a view that Chemkallore (place of red stones) evolved into Chengannur and the name came as a result of abundance of red stones. This name might have got prominence after the Brahmins occupied both banks of Pampa and established the Illams and urs. In the earlier social system in Kavus (Groves) and Kalaries were important components. Kurups, Panikkars and Kaimals wielded the authority in those days.

GENERAL ASPECTS

Mampallil swarupam was the abode of the chiefs of Chengannur who had jurisdiction of a very vast area extending from Peruvanthanam in the eastern high ranges to Attingal in the south. They were known as Janmis or Zamindars who had the power of administration of the land. They were the Juries in their Edavaka (Principality). This system of administration came into existence centuries back. Principals of the Mampally, better known as Vanjipuzha, had fraternal relationship with the royal family of Travancore. Six Vaishnava temples are located in and around Chengannur within a radius of 30 kms. In the past these Vaishnava temples influenced the culture of this locality. The emergence of Vaishnavism can be attributed to the history of the ruling class and their religious favour. Chengannur Nayanar or Viralminda Nayanar or Taliparampu Shiva Nayanar had always an importance in the Chengannur Mahadeva temple. He lost it due to the establishment of Brahmin stronghold.

The growth of Chengannur both as a pilgrim centre and a trade centre is writ in the street names such as Puthenkavu and Puthentheruvu. These inferences are inescapable given the diverse indelible imprints of history.

The past inclusiveness of Chengannur as an administrative division had a vaster area than that in the present and then this area was divided into separate villages by name Vadakkekara, Thiruvandur, Aranmula, Panthalam, Ranni, Sabarimala, Mannar, Ala, Puliyur, Venmoni and Pandanadu. The Chengannur taluk formed later included Chengannur Municipality and 11 villages. The villages are Kurattisseri, Mannar, Budhanur, Puliyur, Cheriyanadu, Ala, Ennakkad, Pandanadu, Tiruvandur, Mulakuzha and Venmoni.

The present Chengannur Taluk has an area of 201 sq. kms.⁸ It borders with Thiruvalla taluk in the north, Mavelikara taluk in the south Aranmula village in Kozhencherry Taluk in the east and Kadapra village in Thiruvalla Taluk in the west. The Chengannur block comprises of Mulakuzha, Ala, Venmony Budhanoor, Cherianad, Mannar, Pandanadu, Puliyur and Thiruvandoor panchayats. As per 1971 census, in Chengannur there were 2,32,218 people, 40,628 houses, 14 villages, 2,18,902 villagers (94.27%) and 13,316 urban people (5.73%). The density of population was 1,154 per sq. km. There are 1,040 women for every 1000 men. The literacy rate is 72.42%. The district headquarters, Alapuzha, is 62 kms. north of Chengannur.⁹

Chengannur is the headquarters of the sub district. Though called a village in the census of 1941, it has several features of urban life. People in the region including villagers are enlightened and urban in their consumption habits and pattern rural urban differences are not present in several respects. Some villages acquire an urban touch in the vicinity of the temples in them. The

⁸ Edamaruk, *India Gazetteer*, Kottayam, 1971, p.903.

⁹ *Vishawavinjanakosham*, Vol.VI, N.B.S., Kottayam, 1972, p.24.

constant arrival of pilgrims to different holy shrines provides some impetus to the development of these villages. Certain villages acquire urban features by the establishment and development of industrial units in them. Chengannur town is much behind the nearby towns of Thiruvalla and Chenganacherry as far as development is concerned. As it is there are no immediate signs of development of Chengannur as a major town and it still has the look of a small town lacking proper planning. The main central road from Thiruvananthapuram to Alwaye is the backbone of Chengannur. By road Chengannur is 117 kms. north of Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Kerala and by rail 126kms. It is 35kms. south of Kottayam. The rail from Ernakulam to the south passes through Chengannur. The railway station is a busy station and somewhat elegant. Most of the trains stop here; the commuters include, in large number those who travel to and from destinations outside Kerala. Chengannur town is a transit place, people passing through it in large number to and from the very many interior places and centres of pilgrimage including Sabarimala. Its development is defined by this feature and also as a market centre for the nearby mofussils. The township just has in it services catering to transitory passengers, customers, from places around and its own inhabitants. It will not be incorrect to say that the Chengannur township is limited to the rather medium shops and hotels around the bus stands (private and public) railway station, the traditional market centre, a few government offices, and the court all located in close proximity, within a radius of about 2kms. Before the gulf boom, like in the case of many other townships in Kerala, the Chengannur township had none of the present appearance; all facilities available beforehand were petty in nature. The town lacks man made

beautification. But nature has blessed it sufficiently to compensate the deficiency, spoiled, however, by unthoughtful structures and other human interventions.

Several years back Poet Nalamkal Krishna Pilla praised the landscape of Chengannur in the following words (substance of his narration in Malayalam):¹⁰

Chengannur rural region is rich in natural endowments; scenic charms, plenty of good water, supple fruits and crops, cool breeze and luxuriant greenery are aplenty everywhere. On the north east row of lands one can see hills and extensive valleys interspersed. Wastelands are rare and arid areas nil. Small streams, level areas and river beds speak of opulent farming areas. Hills and valleys were all made farmlands by the hardworking farming community adding only to the scenic charm. The loyal soil is eager to return with surplus any investment in farming; no seed goes a waste! The natural beauty is enriched by the strong red stone areas, trees and shadows mingled with the paddy fields of the valleys and the sugarcane plantations. River Pampa is the life blood of farming. It ensures perennial water supply to the region. During the rainy season it fetches the rich fertile soil from the eastern hills.

A special geological phenomenon linked to the territory of Chengannur region is interesting. This relates to the volcanic like eruption in the sea during the rainy season off the western coast of Alleppey. The mud eruption burst up in the sea during the rainy season and appeared as if a barrel of oil rose from below the surface.¹¹ Messrs Crawford and Rode who were commercial agents at

¹⁰ Nalamkal Krishna pilla, *Mahakshetrnagalude Mumpil*, Kottayam,1997,p.442.

¹¹ Nagam Ayya, *Travancore State Manual*,Trivandrum,1999,p.91.

Alleppey carried out certain investigations into this phenomenon at the instance of General Cullen the British resident in Travancore and Cochin during A.D.1840-1860. Dr. King of the Geological Survey of India who visited Travancore appeared swayed by the observations of Mr. Crawford. The conclusions were the following: There may be an underground river flow originating from Chengannur; the discharge of the mud is due to hydraulic pressure from the backwater by percolation or through underground channels. The smoothening influence of the water over the mud banks is due to the oil contained in it. It is noteworthy in this respect that according to local opinions there are three well known hollows in the bed of the River Pampa near Chengannur. But their bottoms have been discovered to be solid rock. The hollows remain unlocated as yet.

The village of Edanadu close to Chengannur town is an island that rose up from River Pampa. This island reminds us of the delta regions of rivers near the seashore. During the rainy season most of Edanadu and much of the nearby village Mangalam get cut off from the outside world due to the floods. The rivulet that branches from Pampa and separates Edanadu from other areas is named Varattar. The blood coloured soil of this island is reputed to produce crops worth diamonds.¹² The area has been noted as a conducive habitat of several varieties of birds, especially migratory birds. A project under the leadership of Dr. Salim Ali for studying the migratory birds was conducted during the 1960s. The project was sponsored by the U.N.

¹² Kattakada Divakaran, *Keraleeyagrmangaliloode*, Kottayam, 1977, p.203.

The soil of Chengannur is so rich that many varieties of plants can grow here luxuriantly. The impact of this rural grace is so impressive that it prompted the great Malayalam poet, Vennikulam Gopalakurup, who belonged to Vennikulam to write the following exultation of Chengannur scenario.

Stroll out along the main central road past the bounds of the town; there vast stretches of farm lands can be seen. Unending paddy fields, thick sugarcane plantations and groves with smart coconut trees fanning their dark green leaves and pepper vines winding round their support trees and laden with pepper beads; and with ginger, tapioca, bitter gourd, the ever dancing plantains, mango and jack trees seasonally laden fully with fruits. The fluttering arecanut trees provide a look of a rich bride decorated with all costly ornaments.

About a mile north of Chengannur town, we find the Pandava Rock where the Pandavas and the Noottuvar Rock where the Kauravas, of Mahabharata are supposed to have lived.¹³ These two huge rocks face each other. A number of ancient household utensils and shaped rocks are found in and around the Pandava Rock. On top of the rock we find a small Krishna temple. Local mythology holds that Lord Bhimasena once laid a path by drawing his mighty club along the ground and then holding his chest high and daring anyone to cross his path declared, “Let the river come”, and along the path on the ground made by his mighty club flowed Varattar. This is a story ardently believed true by many orthodox people here. Recently a controversy is raging in the locality regarding the desirability of the revival of the river.

¹³ Kattakada Divakaran, Op.cit., p.203.

There are five famous temples in and around Chengannur, believed to be consecrated by the Pandavas in their names and dedicated to Lord Krishna. Dharmaputra the first born among the Pandavas, is idolized in Thrichittattu, close to the town, Arjuna in Aranmula temple six miles away, Bhima in Puliyoore temple two miles away, Nakula in Thiruvandoor temple two miles away and Sahadeva and Kunthidevi in Thrikodithanam temple ten miles away. The Chengannur Mahadevar (Lord Shiva) temple is a very famous temple of Kerala. In the back of this great temple is the rippling waters of the River Pampa, characterized by purity and spirituality. Vast area surrounded by walls, very tall temple tower rising on strata after strata, the very vast 'srikovil' (sanctum sanctorum) and beautifully sculpted granite stones are marked specialities of the temple. Just half a mile east of the temple, a Narasimha temple, which is rarely found anywhere, is situated. In the srikovil of this very ancient temple the picturesque sculptures are still kept intact. One speciality of this temple is that women are not allowed to enter the inner regions of the temple. Thiruvandoor and Aranmula temples which are as famous as the Chengannur temple are situated within a radius of five to six miles.

Chengannur and Puthenkavu churches are famous and ancient Christian places of worship.¹⁴ The Chengannur church is made in black granite and has decorative paintings, a tower and a lamp in the shape of banyan tree. In these respects the practices of the traditional native architecture have influenced the construction of the church. Besides, the architects, carpenters and masons were

¹⁴ *Viswavinjanakosam*, p. 25.

locals and were trained in the traditional architecture and patterns only. The Christians did not have any reservation in accepting these patterns. In the earlier times there was great co-operation among different communities and as Christian churches were open to all irrespective of caste or community a tradition grew up of offering tributes at this church by several Hindus of the locality. It may also be noted that this type of worship in temples and churches is not confined to this instance. Even today there are many people who worship at holy shrines of different faiths.

It is said that Chengannur was a Brahmin stronghold in the remote past. As years rolled by, due to subdivision the Brahmin ancestral homes dwindled in wealth and social position and eventually most of the land and buildings were bought by others including people of other faiths. Only very few Brahmin homes are left now. 'Thazhamon madhom' (Brahmin home), reputed for ritual perfection and priestly worship, is one of the very few Brahmin houses that survived the test of time. The famous 'Punnarittu madhom' and the Vanjipuzha palace were prominent Brahmin homes once in Chengannur of yester years.

Muslims are limited in number in Chengannur and are confined to a few pockets, notably Mannar and Mulakuzha.

CRAFT DIVERSITY

Industrial arts and handicrafts form invaluable part of the cultural heritage of Kerala.¹⁵ Metal crafts have the pride of place among the traditional manufacturing arts. Bell metal casting is an old industrial art. It has involved

¹⁵ Information from Public Relations Department, Government of Kerala.

mainly two kinds of activities. Images or idols of deities made out of copper, bronze and brass are used for consecration in temples and other religious purposes. Huge 'varpps' (shallow basins of hemispherical shape), multi-layered lamps and household utensils are all made of these metals. The products are noted for their high degree of perfection. Lamps of the most artistic beauty are not a rarity here.

'Moosari' makes several crafts of alloy according to the proportions of copper and zinc or copper and tin used. The alloy of copper and zinc is usually known as 'Pichala' (brass) and the alloy of copper and tin is known as 'Vellodu' (bronze). The most important centre of the bell metal industry is Mannar. The industry is completely in the private sector. The 'pancha loha vigraham' or 'five-metal-idol' is made in Chengannur. The Ayyappa vigraha of Sabarimala was moulded by the Thattavila Nilakanta Panikkar and the five metals included are gold, silver, copper, iron and lead. The bell metal workers are hereditary craftsmen and they carry out the work in their homes. There is very little unemployment among the bell metal workers as they get work throughout the year. Bell metal articles are mostly marketed through middlemen while a few units produce for direct sale to the customers. The bell metal industry has suffered a decline in recent times due to the advent of electric lamps displacing the traditional oil lamps used in households. However, this has been partly compensated by the promotion received in the production of certain lamps and other devices as curios. Though bell metal articles are durable they are at the same time costly and used only for ceremonial purposes. Making of Bells is still a thriving craft.

‘Aranmula Kannadi’ (Aranmula metal mirror)¹⁶ has a unique place among the handicrafts of Kerala. The mirror is a rare curio which any tourist would like to possess, whatever be its price. It takes its name from the village of Aranmula. An 18th century mural in the Padmanabhaswami Temple at Trivandrum shows a semi-celestial lady using an Aranmula mirror. The Aranmula mirror is made of an alloy of copper and tin. It is oval in shape 6 x 4 in size and measures about 1/5 thick. It has got a small tail like handle by which it can be held. The metal mirror resembles the glass mirror in every respect and any object placed against it is reflected fully and clearly. The artisans belong to the Tamil Kammala caste and it is believed that their ancestors came from the Tamil country. Local tradition associates the origin of the mirror with the temple at Aranmula.

Wood Craft

Wood craft is one of the ancient arts of Kerala as testified by its temples and churches which abound in wood carvings.¹⁷ Items of furniture include chairs, tables, settees, sofas, almirahs, cots, and radio stands. Models of animals, deities and toys and kathakali accessories produced by Kerala craftsmen are in very great demand. The models of caparisoned elephants and the carvings of Kathakali dance-dolls are items in popular demand. These models are hot favourites of tourists as well.

¹⁶ *Kerala District Gazetteer*, p.243.

¹⁷ Information from Public Relations Department, Government of Kerala.

Cane and Rattan Work

The majority of the workers in this field produce chairs, teapoys, waste paper baskets and other minor items while some produce setties, chairs, trays, cradles, baskets, shopping bags etc. These units produce their goods mostly against specific orders. Sales through middlemen and retail outlets are also there. Cane and rattan weaving is a process done purely by hand with the help of certain elementary tools.¹⁸

The area has a variety of traditionally developed handicrafts using the rich wealth of flora in the state. Screwpine mat weaving is one of such handicrafts. The art of weaving bamboo-reed mats, baskets and fancy articles is another simple handicraft of this kind traditionally developed in this area.

Jewellery: The jewellery of Kerala is noted for its artistic perfection. Gold smiths are staying in the heart of Chengannur town. Each caste or community had, by tradition, the practice of wearing its typical ornament. An ornament of the Nair women was Nagapadam or serpent-hood so called for the shape of the pendant. The Addiyal was another characteristic ornament used by them. Among the other ornaments used by Nair women for neck were the Yantram, Poothali, Avilmala, and Pulinakham. ‘Mukkuthi’ is an ornament for the nose and in earlier times a gold wire called Gnattu was suspended from it. Cherutali is a necklace worn loose over the breast by Nampoothiri women. Kasu mala and oddyanam were used by Tamil Brahmins. Mekkamotiram a kind of heavy gilded brass ring was worn by Christian women. Ottezhapathaakkam, Kombu, Tala

¹⁸ *Kerala District Gazetteer*, p.240.

etc. were also typical Christian ornaments. 'Valika' was a heavy large hanging ear ring worn by Christian women of yesteryears. It can be safely presumed that none of the generation of women whose ears adorned this heavy ornament survives now. Another ornament which is traditional and invariably worn by married Christian ladies throughout their life is 'Minnu'. Attached to be read it is tied by the bridegroom on the neck of the bride at the wedding ceremony. For the Hindu ladies there is 'Thali'. In both cases great sanctity is attached to this ornament. Though most of the traditional ornaments mentioned above have become defunct now, the Kerala women are still fond of ornaments and jewellery items like necklaces, bangles, chains, earrings, studs etc. which are now made by goldsmiths in a variety of attractive designs.

Granite Carving: This is an art mainly centred in Chengannur. The granite workers manufacture idols, household utensils, articles required for building purposes, road rollers, pillars, survey stones etc. The raw material required by the granite workers of Chengannur is obtained from the rocks from the nearby place of Tittamel.¹⁹ The place is in the vicinity of Pandavanpara. The craftsmen are known as Kallassaris whose ancestors are believed to have been brought from the Tamil country for the construction of the local Mahadevar temple. There is a co-operative society of stone workers at Chengannur which undertakes carving throughout the year. The number of proficient craftsmen engaged in granite work has been shrinking in recent years.

¹⁹ *Kerala District Gazetteer*, p.242.

Pottery: The potmakers known as ‘Kulalas’ make earthen pots for the whole village and are relatively low income group of people. Pongal or ‘Noottonnukalam’ (Hundred and one pots) ceremony is annually celebrated in Devi temples. Suddenly the market for pots turns devotional as women of every Hindu household participate in the ritual which requires pots in large number. The preparation of served food in the pots at the designated venues is the form of worship of the Devi. The ritual comes as a boon to the potmakers. The kulalas are staying in Kallissery area of Chengannur. Their ancestors came from Tamilnadu and nearly 270 families reached here. They used to meet their necessities for life by selling the stock in the festival of Pongal.

THE SOCIETY

The people are generally cultured and industrious. Many people from Chengannur have become famous in various walks of life. Hindus form 2/3 of the population as per 2001 census. It is a centre of the Christians in Central Travancore as well.

May be because of the abundant presence of black granite, ideal for sculpture, we find many sculptors in Chengannur, more than anywhere else in Kerala. The Thattavila family which earned and reputation of their skill in sculpture lives here and they have two important Devi temples (Amankovils) in the locality.

The people evince keen interest in agriculture and trade. However, for quite some years getting salaried jobs occupy the prime place in their preference. Dalits and other backward communities are dependent on casual

labour. There are others who live in Chengannur just for education and jobs. Though food articles and vegetables are produced in large quantities, the cost of living in Chengannur town is high.

Majority of the people in Chengannur have sufficient income to meet their expenses. While there are a lot of people who are dependent on casual labour and petty business, some of the very rich families including planters of Central Travancore are found here and there.

The high cost of living in the town is high cost of living in the town is not indicative of any sophisticated consumption pattern particularly by such residents as are getting remittances from abroad which is in contrast with the case in most other high cost localities of Kerala. Moreover, there are quite a few homeless people. There are cases where a family with five to eight members live huddled together in a small room. It is a paradox that the people of this area, where River Pampa flows, have not had enough drinking water. Many of the natives of this area migrated to other regions including even to the forest areas of Chittar and Moozhiyar to get rid of their wants of life.

The population of Chengannur panchayat with an area of 4 ¼ square miles has a population of 22, 272 (as per 1961 census. In 2001 census it is 26,086).²⁰ The panchayat is situated in the middle of Koipuram, Aranmula, Puliyoor, Mulakuzha, Thiruvanvandoor, Pandanad and Eraviperoor Panchayats. In the agricultural sector, tapioca is cultivated in 2000 acres, paddy in about 600 acres, sugarcane in about 600 acres, and coconut in about 300 acres. Irrigation

²⁰ Kattakada Divakaran, Op.Cit. p.204.

facilities are not sufficiently developed despite the perennial water availability in River Pampa. The floods in the rainy season and drought in the summer cause much damage to the crops. When the Pampa and Kallada irrigation schemes are completed, floods can be controlled and agriculture production can be increased with the help of effective irrigation schemes.

Though good progress is visible in the field of trade, unemployment is rampant among the people due to lack of industries which can provide employment to large numbers. Industrial enterprises, making use of locally available raw materials are lacking in this region. There is an industrial institute.²¹

Chengannur has a pride of place in the educational field with three colleges, two Arts and Science colleges one Engineering College, two training schools, one Industrial Training Institute (I.T.I.) and 108 schools.²² Amenities for protection of health are not lacking with a Taluk Headquarters Hospital. There are some private allopathic hospitals as well. One hospital is a super speciality centre.

In Chengannur both public and private transport buses ply. There is a bus station of the Kerala State Transport Corporation and a municipal bus stand (for private buses) which is in close proximity to the Railway Station. Judicial courts were established since August 19, 1907 during the reign of SriMoolamthirunal Ramavarma Maharaja. Then its jurisdiction extended from

²¹ *Janmabhoomi, Sabarimala Special*, January, 1991,p.11.

²² Chengannur Sub District Office Records.

Sabarimala in the High Ranges in the East to the Arabian Sea in the west. In 2007 the court celebrated its centenary.²³

In the rural Chengannur many homesteads present a picture of plenty, studded with trees and crops. Modern mansions rise up with all the latest amenities of urban life. All these are the result of hard work which found its opening in the Gulf. The people from Chengannur, both men and women, did hard work abroad and brought prosperity to this region. In the past, most of the people seeking livelihood ventured out to Persia, Ceylon and Singapore. They earned wealth abroad and respect at home. These ‘foreign natives’ the so called ‘Videsa Malayalikal’ or ‘pravasi Malayalikal’ have a leading role in the economic structure of Chengannur. This phenomenon commonly found in Kerala had, in fact, originated in Central Travancore, in the region mainly in and around Chengannur and the neighbouring territory of Thiruvalla. In Chengannur and neighbouring villages, we find many grand buildings which indicate the influence of newly acquired wealth mainly through foreign jobs.

The isolation of Kerala imposed by the Western Ghats allowed the development of a political system largely undisturbed by events in the rest of India within this comfort. Hereditary rulers came even in small portions of the land. They were linked by a loose system of vassalage to district and regional chiefs. These in turn were subject to the theoretical sovereignty of the self-styled princes who made claims on the basis that they were the regents of the last Chera emperor. It is believed that between 1500-1000 B.C there was

²³ Court Records.

massive migration from Mediterranean region, to Sahiadi and its valleys. These people merged with the Dravidians with great spread. The last link brought iron to their use in Kerala.

Under the influence of the river water, agriculture flourished and this was telling upon favourably on the social and cultural life of the land and people. As the agricultural civilization developed, worship of the mother deity gained importance. It can be justifiably assumed that the Dravidians deified goddess of earth. Pulavritam was formed from the harvests to please the gods by indulging in dances of gaiety. The early Dravidians, like their successors believed in life after death and worshipped the dead. It was between 1500 BC and 1000 BC that people started migrating from the Mediterranean region to the Sahiya Mountains (Western Ghats) and valleys. These people very rapidly merged with the Dravidians. It was at the end of this flow that these people introduced the use of iron.²⁴

It may be after the merger of the Dravidian race and the Mediterranean Race that brought iron to the area with them that cultivation after clearing the forests started. At this time, when they set fire to and cleared the forest making use of iron instruments, that the worship of mother goddess became very strong. It was during the 4th century BC that the name of Kali was adopted for mother goddess. The myths on yakshi who runs away in fright on seeing iron, Daruka, Vasurimala and Marutha, who were subjugated by Kali, were all part of the faith of the tribal people of the forest area. Kali was not approved as a chief

²⁴ K.Vidyasagar, *Anushtanam, Puravritam Porul*, Payyannur, 1998, p.56.

goddess until AD 400. It is believed that Kali was a tribal goddess, worshipped by offering blood by tribal people like Sabaran. Kali was of dark colour talking different languages and living at junctions, hills, caves and trees.

We have already seen that the beginning and the growth of agricultural life necessitated the movement of the people from the top of the hills to the valleys. It was thus that the banks of Chaliyar, Bharathapuzha, Periyar and Pampa became chief centres of inhabitation and culture. The places like Barace, Nelcynda, Iligu are such centres on the banks of Pampa as described in Periplus. There are rituals even now which remind us of the agricultural people who in the past reached the banks of River Pampa climbing down the hills.

The growth of the settled agricultural society caused the coming of other ethnic groups to these regions. In course of time Buddhists, Jains and Brahmins in that order got settled here. The migrated Brahmins came and settled straight on the banks of the rivers, ideal for cultivation. The centring of such Brahmin villages on the banks of Pampa provides a very clear example of this pattern.

In the general context of Kerala from the very ancient times paddy became a staple crop in river beds for the reason that plenty of water was available in such regions. The farming community tried to produce and preserve food for its annual needs and still have a surplus for sale too. This improved their social and financial status and at the same time enabled the agricultural regions to develop as trade centres. People came to this region even from foreign countries for bartering of goods. In addition, many sanyasis, priests, sorcerers, singers and many such sections of society came to the region and got settled. Tamil Brahmins migrated and settled in South Kerala. They came

through Aruvamozhi and Chenkotta passes in the Western Ghats. There are no records to fix up the exact beginning of this migration. Census details of Kerala show that the number of Tamil Brahmins in Kerala has been much higher than the number of Nampoothiri Brahmins.

By the time of the last Sangam period, Brahmins got land as gift but the supremacy of Brahmins could not be completely thrust on others at this time. As workers and occupations swelled specialized centres for each profession came into vogue. Each and every centre of occupation absorbed experts in one particular profession in which that centre was specialized. One instance of the acting of some deliberateness in this specialization process is obtained from the Tarisapally edict of A.D.849 which gave to Marwan Sapir Iso, the great trader, the right over some land along with the allotment of talented workers in particular trade. At a later stage of the supremacy of Brahmins some time after 12th century A.D. when there was a heavy influx of Vedic Brahmins to Kerala from whom rose the Nampoothiri Brahmins the farmers presented their land as a gift to the temples and became tenants. This caused a new type of landlord-tenant relationship. In addition, the control of the temples enjoyed by the Brahmins influenced the growth of handicrafts. The production was centred on the day to day needs of the Brahmins and worship in the temples.²⁵ This resulted in the indebtedness of the traders to the temples and Brahmins. As a result, the practice of trading the products in other places stopped and the products had to be distributed according to the whims of the Brahmins and petty kings. The

²⁵ K Vidya Sagar, Op.Cit, p.52.

condition that a part of the production of the cash crops should be set apart for temple expenditure was implemented so as social relations became dependent relations, the evolution of attachment to tenants to the temple property became complete. At the same time, the temple expenditure was divided among various centres. Every item of temple festivals and celebrations became the 'right' of each and every handicraftsman who made a contribution to the festival. This enhanced and established their relationship with the temple. We can see proofs of this social evolution in the various rituals connected with the temple where different 'sub-castes' performing different functions. They are known as 'Ambalavasis'. This process which took place between 12th to 16th century A.D. was strengthened by various means including fostering of a royal clan system to ensure flow of income, services, protection and supremacy to the Nampoothiri Brahmins.

Chengannur is a region where settlements came in the distant past and grew ever since to the present times. The governance of these settlements and its features and specialities had certain commonalities as well as certain peculiarities. A primary observation to be made is that the administration in Chengannur followed, by and large, the same pattern as prevailed in the 'nadas' or small kingdoms of which it was part from time to time. Many things were common to Kerala right from very early days especially from and through the rule of the Chera dynasty and even after its disintegration into small principalities under separate kings. Therefore an overview is presented below on the Kerala situation on the basis of the received ideas in this respect.

Rural settlements in Kerala in the past were not villages as in most of India but rather residential clusters focused around large Nair houses with their fortress-like appearance and wealthy Nampoothiri households (Illam). Each Nair house had its own area of influence in economic domination.

The megalithic settlements in Kerala were dispersed far and wide. They were hunters and subsistence farmers leading to a partially nomadic life. Further they were highland agriculturalists using generally of slash and burn techniques and cultivated paddy and sugarcane.²⁶ In Chengannur megalithic sites were discovered from Puliur, Pandanad, Kodukulanji, Kallissery and Budhanur.²⁷

The major forms of subsistence in the region must have been hunting or gathering, shifting cultivation, crafts and dry land agriculture in the semi-forested red soil mid lands. The social formation in the red soil plains of Kerala too was a system of multiple forms of subsistence structured by the dominance of dry land agriculture and peopled by descent groups dispersed as 'Kutis (settlements) clustered into self- sustaining 'urs' which were a sort of clannish settlements bound by a social system rigid in varying measure and led and conducted under headmen.

The most striking peculiarity of this region in the wet land eco system is the excess of water. This would suggest the existence of a great deal of difference in the nature of cultivation followed and labour processes required in the two region types viz. the dry land region and the wet land region.²⁸ Some of

²⁶ Rajan Gurukkal, *Perspectives on Kerala, Kerala District Gazetteer*, Vol, II,1999,P.125.

²⁷ *Kerala District Gazetteers*, Alleppey,Trivandrum, 1975,P.24.

²⁸ Rajan Gurukal, *Characterizing Ancient Society*, School of social science, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam,1998, P.9.

the earlier paddy fields of Kerala were in the high ranges and the elevated alluvial beds. Tamil heroic poems prominently mention dry land crops like millet, maize, pulses, roots and tubers cultivated by clans. Wet rice cultivation was confined to the alluvial eco tracts in the river valleys.

The descent groups of Kerala find mention in the Asokan edicts.²⁹ The chieftdom level polity remained the same but the prevalence of both Brahmanical and heterodox religious ideologies exposed to powerful state systems and periodic exaction and bureaucracy rights was the general reality. The past society of Chengannur was very much an integral part of this reality.

The earliest people of the region were food gatherers who subsisted on roots, fruits and nuts. The tribes of these times had attained considerable civilizational progress. They used stick, bow and arrow as weapons. They were also food producers cultivating rice, breeding cattle, rearing fowls and pigeons. They cooked their food over the fire in pots made of stone and clay. They collected honey and made 'gur' from sugarcane. They worshipped animals, birds and trees. Every settlement had a 'Kavalmaram' (tree that keeps protective watch) with a platform all round its foot called 'Mannam' on which were installed the images of their deities and stones. There was no daily worship at Mannam. Each family made its own kind of offerings. Important decisions of the family were taken in front of the 'Mannam'.⁶⁰

The plough agricultural village system had emerged out of the disruptions of the Aryan tribal social structure. The advent of agricultural

²⁹ Rajan Gurukkal, Op.Cit.

⁶⁰ K.V.Krishna Ayyar, *A Short History of Kerala*, Trivandrum, 1966, p.14.

village society marked the beginning of the town in the process of transformation of social organization of the early societies. There was consolidation of the agricultural village system for a long time without any fundamental change with the important exception of the proliferation of subcastes caused by the development of division of labour and the caste based hierarchy within the Hindu community. This caste mechanism functioned as a political structure to perform different functions according to the needs in the different phases of history and thus could survive even major changes like the advent of colonialism. If it functioned as a political structure of an economic system which combined the relations of slavery and feudalism, at another phase it functioned as a clever device of the feudal colonial exploitation. The division of labour reflected in the 'chaturvarnya system' represented a form of production relation which rendered the primeval unity in the tribes virtually impossible.⁶¹

By and large, the village agrarian system eventually turned temple centred as the Nampoothiri Brahmins who were controlling the temples were also heading the caste based hierarchy. And so the temple centred class society based on the division of labour of 'varna' and caste came into being⁶². The temple as an institution organized relations of production and distribution in such a way that it led to the formation of suitable castes and sub-castes. In this division of labour of the new mode of production Nampoothiris were the most

⁶¹ P.J.Churian, *Essays on Cultural Formations of Kerala*, Kerala District Gazetteer, Trivandrum, 1999, p.8.

⁶² T.Madhava Menon, *A Hand Book of Kerala*, Vol.I, The International School of Dravidian Linguistics, Trivandrum, 2000, p.99.

privileged. The basis of the social formation resultant from these forces of production was on the concept of 'Kadama' which may be translated as duty or responsibility. The duty of those at the lowest level was to engage themselves totally in production related activities. Several specializations emerged on this foundation as in the case of those who supervised the operations or provided the magical supports required by the belief system. At the intermediary level they are known as 'karalar'. Some of them were constituted into protective forces which later came to be known as 'Changathams'. In the early inscriptions they were known in terms of multiples of hundreds, as for example, 'Munnuttuvar' (three hundreds), Arunoottuvar (six hundred) etc. The authority to enforce these interrelations was vested with the title of 'kutipathi' i.e. the headman of the settlements who was known as 'uralar'.

Chengannur has been described as the southernmost of the 64 legendary Brahmin settlements instituted by Parasurama in Kerala. Many Brahmin colonies were set up between Payyannur in the North and Pampa in the South⁶³. Ten southern 'gramas' mark the route from Vaikkam to the South. These gramas are Vaikkom, Ettumanur, Kumaranallur, Kidangur, the forest route which reaches east of Tiruvalla, Kidamuri, Kaviyur, Aranmula, Chengannur and leads to the East coast route of Quilon⁶⁴. In the colonisation process there was also the spread of the Nair villages called 'Taras' which flourished as self sufficient village societies within the Brahmin led religion⁶⁵. This cultural

⁶³ Ibid, Vol.II,p,547.

⁶⁴ Rathi Ramachandran,Girija, Ammini, *History of Medieval Kerala*, Pragathi Publications,New Delhi, 2000, p.9.

⁶⁵ P.J.Cherien,*Essays on the Cultural Formations of Kerala, in Kerala District Gazetteer*,Vol.IV,Thiruvananthapuram,1999,p.15.

identity of the Nair caste might have been a regulating force in the power relations of the caste system, it being a political system than a mere form of the division of labour. There is a view that it was a force that consolidated itself in the later stages of feudal Kerala as a morale booster to resist the alien interferences in culture and politics.

Nadu was a congeries of Taras or village republics.⁶⁶ The assembly of the Nadu was a representative body of immense power and even it had the power to punish the erring ministers of the Raja. The 'hundreds' acted as checks on the despotic power of the ruling authority. They protected the rights and privileges of the people intact. The 'six hundreds' mentioned in the Syrian copper plate gave sanction to the action of the 'Perumal' in granting certain privileges to the Christian settlers. The three hundreds of Nanthuzhinad were entrusted with the general supervision of charity.⁶⁷ There can be no doubt that the village associations and assemblies had considerable share in the management of the local affairs in various parts of the country. These organizations of 'hundreds' attached to feudatory chiefs were assigned the duty of protection of land and other religious endowments and are identified by writers of history of Kerala in the past as democratic organizations in the past.

The village republics exercised socially and politically considerable influence on the community and formed centres of local self government. They managed all local affairs, possessed common funds, levied cesses to meet certain local expenses and acted as arbitrators or judges in matters of dispute

⁶⁶ K.P.Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, New Delhi, 1982, p,251.

⁶⁷ Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol.IV, Trivandrum, 1999, p.32.

arising between persons living within the limits of their local jurisdiction. In these small republics, the Nair inhabitants were represented by their ‘karnavars’ (elders). They were self-contained and they exercised their authority through their own officers. They had their own temples, their own pasture lands, their own artisans, their own washermen, barbers and men of other occupations, in short everything that was necessary to make life sumptuous and comfortable. Every villager shared the joys and sorrows of his co-villagers.⁶⁸

In the above order of things the land was not tilled in common under the system of village community, the evolution of private property took a special course. It was not the private property in modern sense.⁶⁹ Nor is the land related to its traditional holders -- the janmis. The land functioned, under the set up in Kerala, as a natural means which related to it certain socially determined status and rights of the different groups of people in the society.

During the period of the state formation in Kerala political and administrative structures and institutional arrangement took various forms. Historians have given accounts of such forms and speak of Brahmin oligarchy, representative villages, Rakshapurushas, Kazhakams and Thali and speak of certain amount of democratic and decentralized administration.⁷⁰ The Thalies were institutions where religious and temporal matters were discussed..⁷¹ The ‘Thalies’ obtained a virtual auditory function over the local chieftains gaining gradual dominance over them. In keeping with the new culture centring round

⁶⁸ K.P.Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, NewDelhi, p.259.

⁶⁹ P.J.Charian, *Kerala District Gazetteer*, p,17.

⁷⁰ T.Madhava Menon, *A Handbook of Kerala*, p,236.

⁷¹ K.P.Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, p,310.

institutions and sanctified by formal reduction of decisions to writing, 'kachams'(written conventions) were adopted for the management of the temples and their authority. The convention adopted at Muzhikkulam became the model for subsequent adoptions.⁷² The Chengannur temple also had representation in the Muzhikkulam Kacham.

Then came disruption of the autonomy of the agricultural village system by the interference of the Portuguese in the economic and political life of Kerala and by 16th century the disruption becomes almost complete.⁷³ But the changes in the economic and political life of Kerala did not lead to the formation of a new society by breaking from feudal relations. The important cultural change during this period is the regionalized community of culture. With the political interference of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English the power relations of the feudal system began to change. Local chieftains maintained their power through the ideology of tradition of language and culture.

Important principalities of theoretical sovereignty of self-styled princes were: Vadakkumkur (in Kottayam district), Thekumkur (Ghat area in between Kayamkulam and Vadakkumkur), Chempakasserri (Ambalapuzha), Kayamkulam, Desinganad (Kollam) and Venad. Several such small principalities were spread all over Kerala. Now it is difficult to find out the exact territories of the principalities because they became extinct since pretty long. Later on the southern principalities were merged into Venad or were conquered by Marthandavarma and as a result, the kingdom of Travancore

⁷² T.Madhava Menon, *A Handbook of Kerala*, p,236.

⁷³ Ibid.

emerged.⁷⁴ Chengannur became part of Travancore during the time of Marthandavarma. There was a royal family at Attingal connected with Venad and Desinganad. Without administrative power, a new principality was formed with the name Vak Vanjipuzha which was located at Mampalli Mana at Kilimanur.⁷⁵ The descendants were deputed for supervision of collection of 'Janmikaram' and the temples of the northern parts of Travancore beyond Kayamkulam and they made their headquarters on the southern bank of River Pampa at Chengannur. Their supervisory jurisdiction extended upto Peruvanthanam, Peerumedu and Devikulam in the high ranges. The method of administration in Travancore at that time was carried out under an amicable adjustment between the conquered principalities and Venad and as a result of this no controversies arose regarding the administration between conqueror and the conquered.⁷⁶ Gradually the government of Travancore took over the control of administration without any hurdle. In course of time Vakvanjipuzha became Vanjipuzha or Mampally and they were given a paternal status by the Travancore Kings. The administration went on peacefully as a result of these policies. Different types of art forms and traditions grew in the conditions.

The administrative machinery introduced by the British Government was altogether new and was based on a system of official hierarchy in which the people as a body had no place or voice. The village republics of earlier ages were converted into local administrative body. The lands were divided into 'Janmam' (free of tax) lands and 'Pandaravaka' (Taxable) lands. In Chengannur

⁷⁴ Travancore *Archaeological Series*, Vol.IV, Trivandrum, 1999, p48.

⁷⁵ Acharya Narendra Bhooshan's Memories.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Vanjipuzha Pandarathil had Janmam rights over lands which were free from taxes. In the post independence period the properties of the Vanjipuzha Chief were also assumed by the government by the close of 1955.

LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

The first step towards the development of local self government was taken with the promulgation of Travancore Village Panchayat Regulation Act in 1925. Under this act the government had the power to declare any revenue village or group of villages as a village for this purpose.⁷⁷ Today, after a long evolution and legislative measures at the national and state levels local self governments enjoying relatively great autonomy have come into vogue.

Divisions of Local Governance in Chengannur

The division consists of Chengannur examined here consists of the Chengannur municipality and the panchayats of Thirvanvandoor, Pandanad Mannar, Budhannur, Puliur, Cheryanad, Venmony, Mulakuzha and Ala.⁷⁸

CHENGANNUR MUNICIPALITY: The following is the exercise done to familiarise the varied nature of land, the people and their life milieu in Chengannur. A convenient division was felt to be the division at the Municipal or Village Panchayat level. This account covers most parts of the Historical Region of Chengannur. However, it is not exhaustive.

Chengannur Municipality consists of 24 wards⁷⁹ namely Mundenkavu, Kodyattukara, VazharMangalam, Mangalam North, Mangalam South, Edanadu

⁷⁷ *Kerala District Gazetteers*, p.469.

⁷⁸ *Chengannur Vikasana Rekha*, 2002-2007,p.7.

⁷⁹ Chengannur Municipality Records.

West, Edanadu East, Puthenkavu East, Puthenkavu West, Arattukadavu, Mulapadavu, Malayil, ITI ward, College Ward, Angadical South, Kezhcherimal, Thittamel, Bethel Ward, Pandavanpara, Railway station Ward, Town Ward, Temple Ward East, Temple Ward, Valiapalli Ward.

Mundenkavu ward of the municipality is in the north of the town. The Tazhamon Madham, the hereditary Thantrikal at Sabarimala, Vadasserikavu temple, NSS Taluk office, Vanjipuzha Palace and the Industrial Estate, and Erapuzha Bridge constructed during the British rule are important sites.

Kodiyattukara is situated between the MC road and Pampa River and is in the proximity of lands belonging to Chengannur Mahadeva temple. Some of the famous Brahmin Illams are located here.

Vazhar Mangalam North and Mangalam South are geographically one entity. Three fourth of its area is surrounded by the Pampa River and Varattar.

Edanadu and Edanadu East together form a natural island surrounded by River Pampa and its branch Varattar which joins the river back at the western end of the island. As it is low lying very close to the river every year during the floods most of the area becomes submerged in water. This contributes to the fertility of the land through the deposit of alluvial soil every flood brings with it. Eraviperur and Koipuram panchayats are the other boundaries of the island.

Puthenkavu East and Puthenkavu West have Aranmula and Mulakuzha panchayats as boundaries. The famous St Mary's Orthodox Cathedral with a history of 200 years and Puthenkavu Marthoma Mathilakam

Assention Church with a history of over a century are housed in Puthenkavu. One of the deepest and dangerous parts of River Pampa called Athimoodu is here. This part of the river was so unnavigable that all the hill produce (spices, pepper, ginger, turmeric, cinnamon, cardamom, arecanut, copra, nutmeg, teak wood, honey, ivory, rose wood, etc.) from as far as Sabrimala and Ranni Nilakal Regions, were carried in large boats up to this point and then transported over the land route to another point down the river from where they were shifted to other boats and the journey continued safely further through the river to the destinations like the Alappuzha port and other trade centres. That point is known as Pandakasalakadavu as in the first lap all these items were transported to Pandakasalas (warehouses) located at the spot down the river. This place used to be a very famous trade centre where Christians from all over Central Travancore came and settled down for trade purposes. Some of the house names give sufficient proof for this trade oriented migration. It may be noted that these names carry the place names from where the migrant traders came such as Karthikapally, Cheriyanadu, Venmony, Mannar, Edanad etc. However, Thekku veetil, Kizhakku veetil, Padinjattu, Alumoottil, Arayalumootil, Kizhakkethalal, Ayrukuzhil, Aykkarethu, and Mathootharakantangu where Mathoo Tharakan stayed for some time in contact with Marthoma VII are of very ancient settlers.

Arattukadavu: It has the River Pampa on one side and wards 9, 11, 19, 21 and 22 of Chengannur as other boundaries. The idols of the Mahadeva temple are ceremoniously bathed in the Pampa River on festival days at the Kadavu (Ghat). The place name is derived from this 'arattu' ceremony. The

bridge Mithrapuzhapalam connects this part of Chengannur Municipality with Mangalam. Nairs and Brahmins form the majority of the population here.

Mulapadavu has wards 10, 12, 13, 16, 21 and 9 as boundaries. Ezhavas, blacksmiths and a number of gold smiths live in this locality. The K.S.E.B. 110 KV sub station is located here.

Malayil Ward has more landed area than from Mangalam and Edanadu. The St. Anne's Girls Higher Secondary School is located here. Mulakuzha Panchayat wards 7, 8, 10 and 12 form boundaries. Some of the early planters of Kerala lived here.

ITI Ward has Mulakuzha panchayat and wards 11, 10, 15 and 13 of Chengannur as boundaries. Government ITI, ITI for Women, PIP offices are located here.

College Ward has Mulakuzha panchayat wards 12, 15, 13 as boundaries. Chengannur Christian College is situated here. This ward came to prominence only after the establishment of the College in 1964.

Angadical South Ward has Mulakuzha, Puliur panchayats and wards 14 and 16 as boundaries. The famous Central Hatchery is situated here.

Kezhcherimel Ward has Puliur panchayat and wards 10, 12 and 15 of Chengannur municipality as boundaries. Pulikkunnu Devasthanam Temple is **Thittamel ward** has Puliur panchayat and wards 16, 11, 18, 19 Chengannur Municipality as boundaries. Olivette Aramana of the Marthoma Church is situated here.

Pandavanpara Ward has Puliur panchayat and wards 16 and 18 of Chengannur municipality as boundaries. The legendary Pandavanpara and

Noottavanpara, where the heroes of Mahabharatha are supposed to have lived during their 'vanavasa' (exile in forest) lend charm to its history. The government is developing this area as a centre of tourist attraction.

Railway Station Ward is a thickly populated ward and has Puliur panchayat and wards 17, 16, 19, 20, 21 and 22 of Chengannur municipality as boundaries. The Chengannur railway station, where most of the Sabarimala pilgrims alight and with the highest daily collection among wayside stations, is being developed as a model railway station.

Bethel Ward has wards 19, 17, 20 and 21 of Chengannur municipality as its boundaries. Bethel aramana of the Orthodox Syrian Church with its 'grandhasala' (library) is also here.

Town Ward has wards 22, 10, 11, 18 and 20 of Chengannur Municipality as its boundaries. The famous Sasthampuram market is located here.

Temple Ward East Perumkulam Padam: A famous sports stadium is planned to be constructed here. Small scale industries office is situated here.

Temple Ward The famous Mahadevar temple is located here.

Valiapally Ward: The famous Old Syrian Church is located here. The ward is also known as Puthentheruvu. The famous Trichitat temple is located here. The nearest ward is Mudenkavu on the south and Pandanad panchayat on the west.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ *Chengannur Municipality Budget, Chengannur, 2007, p.9.*

CHENGANNUR BLOCK PANCHAYAT is situated on the easternmost part of Alapuzha district, a little to the north and 53kms.away from the district head quarters⁸¹ It has mixed geographical features with a total area of 128.10 sq. kms. The following panchayats are included: Mulakuzha, Venmony, Cheriyanad, Ala, Puliur, Budhanur, Pandanad, Thiruvanvandoor and Mannar. The boundaries of Chengannur block are Pathanamthitta District in the North, Chengannur Municipality in the east, Mavelikara block in the south and Haripad block in the west. The Ernakulam – Kottayam -- Thiruvananthapuram railway passes through the middle of the block for a distance of 9 kms. The M. C. road (Main Central Road from Thiruvananthapuram to Aluva through Kottayam) passes through the block panchayat for a distance of 15 kms.through Mulakuzha panchayat in the south east and Thiruvanvandoor panchayat in the north east. The Achenkovil River flows along the southern part of the block separating the Mavelikara and Chengannur block areas.⁸²

Along the northern part of the block, Varattar (a branch of River Pampa) and the Manimalayar flows covering Thiruvanvandoor, Pandanadu and Mannar panchayats. There are many canals connecting these rivers and there are a number of other small and large streams. But now the canals are not navigable as many streams are filled with soil; the drainage system also is in a crisis. But these rivers serve the purpose of providing surface source of water. The flow of water is mainly from the east to the west following the land slant. The south eastern areas of the block panchayat have red soil and pebbles. The western

⁸¹ *Chengannur Vikasana Rekha*,Chengannur,2002-207,p.20.

⁸² Ibid.

areas are filled with mud and sand. The northern parts have sticky alluvial soil. The block area is generally situated from 3 to 20 metres above sea level.

The average temperature of the block panchayat area is between 24 and 34 degree Celsius. The south eastern and north western monsoon rains are heavy in this area. The summer rains are also beneficial. The various environmentally unfriendly human activities have led to several problems with respect to the water resources of the area. Filling of ponds and low lying fields, unscientific sand mining, extension of land of the river, razing of hills for filling purposes, and block bunding and pollution with pesticides, chemicals, wastes and plastic bags are some of them.

Most of the groves (kavus) in the block panchayat are fine examples of bio-diversity. The area preserves several species of the flora now disappeared from elsewhere. A number of groves are extant but some have survived. They are the following: the famous Sarangakavu of Venmony (named Skhandhavanam in Hindu puranas), the well known Vallikavu of Elinjimal in Budhanur panchayat, the Pallathu sarpakavu at Anavathukkara of Thiruvanvandoor panchayat and the Koyikal kavu on the western part of the Kuratti temple of Mannar panchayat are rich sources of bio-diversity with plenty of various medicinal plants. There are great many monkeys in Sarangakavu and Vallikavu even now.⁸³

⁸³ Chengannur Vikasana Rekha, p,21.

The census of 2001 lists 179208 people in the Chengannur block area. Of these, 92,906 are women and 86,302 are men. There are 32,149 scheduled castes and 88 scheduled tribes in the population.

Mulakuzha: Mulakuzha grama panchayat has 14 wards --- Nikarumpuram, Piralassery, Mulakuzha, Pattangad, Kudaykamaram, Mannarakad, Karakad, Karinnan, Payika, Kozhuvallur, Thazha bhagam, Arikkara, Valiparambu, Perigala and Kannuvelikavu. It is situated in the south east corner of Alapuzha district very close to the Pathanamthitta district and is full of hills and hillocks, a feature different from other areas of the Alapuzha district.

Mulakuzha Panchayat is bound on the north by the Chengannur municipality with the same geographical nature, on the south by Kulanada panchayat of Pathanamthitta district and Changapadam a boundary village of Venmony panchayat, on the west by Ala panchayat and on the east by the Neervilakam canal.⁸⁴ Though there are no legendary references in connection with the name of the place, certain inferences are in vogue among the local people. Thiru Mulakuzha in ward 4 and the adjoining areas are known as Mulakuzha. This area is the lowest in the whole of the panchayat. Elderly people strongly promote the story that about 15 acres in this area was once a forest. A considerable part of this forest was filled with bamboo. Gradually the forest was cleared for human habitation. The roots and the stem of the bamboo stem below the soil surface remained giving the appearance of pits of

⁸⁴ Mulakuzha Panchayat Vikasana Rekha, Mulakuzha, 2006-2007, p. 2.

bamboo. Thus pits full of bamboo (mula) stems came to be called Mulamkuzha which later became Mulakuzha.⁸⁵

As regards the composition of religious communities this village is a micro edition of the Kerala or national set up. Hindus, Christians and Muslims live here in that numerical order. The Sastha temple at Karakad clearly speaks of the influence of the Buddhist religion in the region. People of various religions live here harmoniously.

Arikkara is a village on the higher places and the name is a combination of two words in Malayalam 'Ari' meaning rice and 'Kara' denoting place. The inference is that in earlier times this village on the higher plains was cultivating paddy extensively and was a rich source of rice supply for many areas around. It was a general practice in Kerala of having paddy cultivation in suitable areas in the hilly regions. The village of Anchumalanada is a place of a rare worship practice. Here people worship the legendary Kaurava heroes of Mahabharatha. This worship was the result of the resistance of the Dravida culture against the onslaught of the Aryan religion. Even now, offerings comprise of chicken, fowl, arrack and all the items for chewing which is a continuation of the practice of animal sacrifice. Another notable aspect is that there is no temple structure here.

Quite different from other places, in the past the problems of untouchability did not affect this area very much. Elsewhere in Chengannur and in the general context of Kerala the children of the Brahmin families were made to take bath at least two or three times before they were allowed to enter the

⁸⁵ Janakiya Asoothrana Padhathi, Mulakuzha, 2005, p.11.

house so as to ward off the effect of pollution, if any, while they were outside; the promoters of untouchability expressed their protest against a magistrate belonging to a low caste by hanging a pot filled with toddy in front of the court; once, a local upper caste leader set fire to the primary school and committed suicide as a mark of protest against a low caste being admitted in the school. Such reactions never occurred in Mulakuzha. The women of the lower castes were not required to seek the permission of anyone to cover the upper part of the body. However, the way the low caste labourers were given food by the landlords indicated some influence of untouchability. They had to eat from a leaf placed in a pit dug on the floor where the food was served.

Social reformers like Sri Narayana Guru and Sri Ayyankali, the great social reformers of Kerala, visited the region as part of the social reformation activities.

Thiruvandoor

This panchayat has 12 wards.⁸⁶The boundaries of the panchayat are Kuttoor panchayat in the north, Pandanad panchayat in the south;, Pandanad panchayat and Kadapara panchayats of Pathanamthitta district in the west and Chengannur municipality in the east. This grama panchayat has a history of 48 years and is the smallest panchayat in Chengannur block. The total geographical area is about 10.05 sq. kms. This region concentrates mainly on small scale trade activities. In the past pursuit of hereditary occupations was a general practice but they are extinct now. A large number of the people have secured

⁸⁶ Thiruvandoor Panchayat Varshika Padhathi Rekha, Thiruvandoor,2006-2007,p.9.

jobs abroad. Animal husbandry is the present main occupation here. Soil deposits in this region resulted in the diversion in the river. Polluted water is a great problem of the people living here. Thiruvandoor, Nannad, Vanavathukara, Umayattukara, Koladathusseri and Eramallikkara are regions here the people have a low standard of living. Total population in the panchayat according to 2001 census is 15,663. Of these, 7708 are men and 7955 are women. The total scheduled caste men are 1444.

Thiruvandoor claims legendary significance. Nakula, the fourth among the five Pandava brothers, installed the idol of Thiruvandoor Kshetara. The temple was visited by the famous Alwar Saint Nammalwar.⁵⁷ This place was once a forest. Pandavas, during their vanavasa (exile in the forest) is believed to have stayed here. It is said that Panchali, their wife, meditated here for long to win the favour of the 'Surya' God (Sun God). The God granted her the Akshayapatra a vessel ever ready with food needed for the pandavas during their exile. Commemorating this event the Thiruvandoor Kshetra serve free food to the people. It is believed that because of this the place is known as Thirupandava uru⁵⁸ which shortened as Thiruvandoor. A different view holds that this place had lots of black beetle which murmur all the while; 'vand' in Malayalam denotes this fly. For this reason this place is known as Thiruvandoor. The Thiruvandoor temple is among the 108 divya Kshetras of the land.

⁵⁷ Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol,V P.42.

⁵⁸ Nalamkal Krishna Pilla, *Mahakshetragalude Munpil*, p.629.

Mannar:

The Mannar grama panchayat has 17 wards and it is situated on the western end of the Chengannur block. It is connected with some part of upper Kuttanad, the rice bowl of Kerala. Until the bridges appeared Mannar was an island surrounded by the rivers Achenkovilar, Pampa, Manimalayar and many canals. Mannar and Kurattisseri villages are included in this panchayat. The panchayat has three water bowl areas such as Ilampanam, Marakam and Kuttamperur. As it is surrounded by water bodies, the panchayat has been giving stimulus to agricultural activities. This panchayat is the second largest panchayat in Chengannur and its area is 18.56 sq. km. Its total population is 24,536. Of these, 14,063 are men and 15,473 women. A view is that Mannar derived its name from a Koviladhikari of Erimathur Kovilakam who was named Mandhathavu and that the place name commemorates his name. No other version is heard of.

The Eramathur area is historically important in many respects. In earlier times the road from Kanyakumari to the northern parts of Kerala went through Eramathur. The wellknown ancient Koikkal Kottaram (Koikkal Palace) is situated here. When Mannar was the northernmost frontier of the Kingdom of Kayamkulam. Then the kings used to stay here and dispense matters of administration. There was a palace known as Elayidath Kotaram here which was meant for the youngsters of the palace which is no more there. Today only the dilapidated part of the Koikkal Kottaram remains. There is also a pond attached to the 'Kavu'.

It is believed that the mythical 'Naranathu Bhranthan' lived here. There is a pond here even today known as 'Naranathu Kulam'. It is believed that there was a hill here earlier. Today it is not there but the spot has still the name 'Naranathu Kunnu'.

One of the few famous 'Surya Kshetrams' (temples dedicated to the Sun God) in India is located here.

The famous Muhuyuddeen Jum A Masjid on the side of the old 'Rajapatha' (state road) is believed to have been built by the Muslim missionary Hazrath Malik Dinar and his team about thousand years ago.

Mannar is a place of numerous temples most of which are dedicated to Siva and Bhagavathi, the most important Siva temple being the Thirukkuratti Temple. The Kuratti Mathilakam was as famous as Kodungallur Mathilakam. Six acres and 45 cents is the area of the temple yard. Women are denied entry in the inner precincts of the temple where Siva is in 'Tapas'. The Siva temple has a Vishnu temple in its premises where women are allowed. The most important Bhagavathi temple is at Kuttamperur where Kroshtamuni legended to be the founder of many temples in Mannar is believed to have entered 'samadhi'. The place has also the rarity of having a Saraswathi temple and a Surya temple. The placename Kuratti where the temple is located is derived from the name of the temple. It is also believed that Kroshtaka Muni, engaged in the practice of asceticism at this place and that the place Kurattisseri derived its name from it. Mythical lores are several in and around Mannar. Of these the most popularly known relates to the 'Yakshi' at 'Pannaikadavu' who was chased by

Kadamattathu Kathanar crossing the river on a plantain leaf and finally nailing her to the palm tree at Panayannarkavu.

Mannar neighbours with Parumala with the famous Panayannarkavu mentioned in Unnuneeli Sandesam and famous for its mural paintings. The Parumala Church is a pilgrim centre of Orthodox Syrian Church and is in the name of St.Gregorios Metropolitan. The annual festival here is in September.

Of the few mosques in Chengannur two are located in Mannar. They are Iramathoor Jamayathu Palli of the 14th century origin and the Puthiya Palli (new church) attached to which there is a Madrasa.

Industrially Mannar derives its importance as centre of metal industry. Alind Switch Gear Factory and several metal industries are located here. Brick construction is an important occupation. Several small scale industries thrive well in Mannar grama panchayat. Silver, jewellery, mat making from screwpine leaves, snacks making, tailoring and machine and cycle assembling are some of them. Inland fisher folks receive help from the panchayat in getting the needed materials for fish catching and sale. Kudumbasree Ayalkuttam units played an important part in enriching the women of low income groups. Scheduled caste people number about 3500 and Scheduled tribes more than 60. Both government and private hospitals in Allopathy, Homeopathy and Ayurvedic treatments are located here.

Mannar occupied importance in the annals of Travancore history. On the northern side of the temple, known as Padanilam, a decisive war (1741 A.D.) was waged between King Marthanda Varma and the Kayamkulam Raja in which the latter was defeated and had to enter into an agreement with the

former. This treaty is known as Mannar Treaty. This place is situated at a short distance of two furlongs from the Koratti temple. By the treaty of Mannar, the Travancore Raja received all the territories of the Kayamkulam Raja and received the tributes of a sum of Rs. 1000 and an elephant from the defeated Onattu Raja. This treaty led to the drafting of another treaty between Dutch and Travancore in 1748.

Ala Grama Panchayat

In between the rivers of Pampa and Achenkovil lies the Ala grama panchayat.⁵⁹ The region is surrounded by hills and its territory consists of water logged punja paddy fields, dwelling plots and plain lands. Its boundaries are Chengannur Municipality in the north and Puliur in the south, Cheriyanad and Puliur Panchayats in the west and Mulakuzha and Venmony panchayats in the east.

The Ala region is mainly watered by River Achenkovil and its tributary known as Utrapally River joined by minor rivers like Parathipalliyar and Kuzhipuzhayar. Since Venmony panchayat constructed the bund Mullalichira, the flow of River Achenkovil has taken its course to Vettiur depriving Utrapalliyar its source of water. Sometimes continuous floods in the region from Venmony to Budhanur bring about the divergence of rivers from their normal course.

The Ala name is derived from the term 'ala' in Malayalam denoting 'workshop'. The place was famous in the past for the agricultural implements

⁵⁹ Ala Grama Panchayat *Janakiya- Asuthrana Padhathi*, Ala, 2006-2007, p.7.

produced by the blacksmiths (Kollan) in their 'ala's. The blacksmiths were brought from Pandi Nadu and allowed to stay along the course of the banks of the Utrapalliyar. One family Velutheril Kizhakethil Kollan family narrated the story of this tradition.

This place was under the control of the Naduvazhi of Chengannur. Edapalli, Vazhoor and Vanjipuzha Janmis were the Naduvazhis of this region who inhabited and used the plain lands. The Adiyalar or Kudiyan (the labourers) had to have their living at the hill side and deforested regions. Ala region is an example of such discrimination in the past.

This panchayat was formed on August 17, 1957. The panchayat has 12 wards: Ala, Unmath, Pumala, Malamadi, Kinaruvila, Valapuzha, Kodukulnaji, Kochutharapadi, Chammath, Pennukkara, Pullamthazham and Neduvarumkodu. The total geographical area is 10.44 sq. kms. The population of this region is 13,187. Of these, 6,323 are males, and 6,864 are females. Schedule caste population is 2,911 according to the 2001 census. Scheduled tribes had no representation in this panchayat. Muslims, Brahmins, Nairs, Ezhavas, Viswakarmajar, Christians, Pulayar, Sambavar, Sidhanar, Thandar, Chaka, Vathi, Pathiyan, Kakkalan, Velan and Varnavar were the castes and communities who occupied this region. Of the total area 425 hectares constitute paddy lands, 667.2 hectares garden lands, and the rest water bound regions. This region concentrates on cultivation of paddy, coconut, betel leaves and vegetables. This panchayat area has witnessed progressive development in social and economic process.

Budhanur Grama Panchayat

It is believed that Budhanur derived its name from Budha (Budhan in Malayalam), a possibility prompted by the prevalence of Buddhism here.⁶⁰ The idol consecrated at Budhanur Padinjattincherry Kshetra was a Buddhist image. This panchayat has diverse peculiarities either due to the physical features or due to some other reason. Some of the place names are indicative of these peculiarities. Kadampur, Peringad, Thaiyur, Ennakkattu, Elanjimel, Peringalapuram and Ulanthi are some of them. The total area of this panchayat is 12.92 sq. kms. It has 13 wards. The population of the region is 18,563 according to the 2001 census, 8,839 men and 9,724 women. Total houses of the region stood at 4,157. There were 3,719 scheduled castes. Family below the poverty line numbered 2,450 as per the census. The boundaries of the panchayat are Pandanad panchayat in the north, River Achenkovil in the south and also west and Puliur panchayat in the east. The main industry of this region is brick making. Wire cut bricks are also produced. There are 60 brick kilns in the Panchayat. About 2000 labourers are employed in this occupation. Due to the unavailability of suitable soil, brick construction is facing problems. Paddy had been a major crop in this region. However, recently paddy cultivation faces problems. Many farmers leave their land fallow because of the enormous increase in the cost of production and low returns, if not less. Besides, due to the accumulation of sand over the years, many of the paddy lands are not suited for paddy cultivation. Coconut farming is also not in a proper state for reasons of

⁶⁰ *Budhanur Janakiya-Asuthrana Padhathi Rekha*, Budhanur, 2005,p.7.

wilt root disease and high cost of labour. However, agriculture based development is still the most suited and scopeful course for the region.

A notable feature of the Dravidian cultural past of the life and worship of the people here was the prominence given to 'Nagaradhana' (snake worship), 'Thara' organisation and 'Kavus'. Remnants of such a past are present in the cultural life of the people even today. 'Kavu' and snake worship are in vogue throughout the region. That brings to our attention to the ancient arts and art forms such as Koothu and Patayani. The region reminds us of the rich harvest festival. The Kunnathukulangara Devi temple has a distinctive 'kettukazchha'. On the 10th day of the 'Utsavam' (festival) the 'pallivilakku' (the sacred temple lamp) gets lightened.⁶¹ There are two such lamps with a height of 50 metres. About a lakh of lights using small lamps are lightened during this time. Lamp lightening ceremony of such a proportion is very rare in Kerala. This reminds us of the principle of religious 'tokrakke' culture, Vasthukala and again a sense of prosperity. Budhannur is mentioned as a historic village by Nagamayya in his Travancore State Manual. Several Brahmin Madhams and the well known Ennakkattu palace are located here. Adimattathu Madham (a Brahmin residence) enjoyed the rights over the Malayalapuzha Devi temple. Once a royal couple of Travancore proceeding to meet the Vanjipuzha Chief was attacked that Budhanur under the direction of Valavamkodu Potti of Budhanur. The attackers cur the Pallak in which the couple travelled. This later fetched the people of Budhanur the name 'Pallakuvettis'. The couple got rescued mainly

⁶¹ Ibid, p.20.

under the leadership of Vanjipuzha Chief. King Marthanda Varma honoured and remembered him. This was the circumstance how Vanjipuzha got extensive property in Budhanur. The King punished the Potti and the area. The Madham of the Potti was dismantled and in its place came the Valavamkodukulam. Utrapalli River, which supplied water to Venmony, Ala and Budhanur, was later diverted at Venmony causing great harm to the people of Budhanur. It is talked around among the people that Ramayyan Dalava had the divine power to divert the river. (there are different versions of this incident.)

Ennakattu palace occupies a place of importance in the history of the land. The rajas of this palace were Koil Thampurakanmar (Koil Thampurakanmar were princes who married from the reigning family enjoying the luxury of the palace but without any responsibility or power or work). It also produced some of the enlightened leaders of the labour movement in Travancore like R. Sankara Narayanan Thampi who later became the first speaker of the first Kerala Assembly.

Pandanad

Pandanad grama panchayat has 12 wards: Pramattukara, Pandanadu, Madvana, Prayar, Muthuvazhi, Vanmazhi East, Vanmzhi West, Mithramadham, Kizhvanmazhi, Pandanadu East, Pandanadu West and Illimala.⁶² The boundaries of the panchayat are the panchayats of Thiruvanvandoor in the north, Puliur and Budhannur in the south, Kadapra of Pathanamthitta district in the west and the municipal area of Chengannur in the east.

⁶² *Pandanad Grama Panchayat Varshika Padhadhi, 2005-2006, p.2.*

This panchayat was formed on 1st January 1962. The land here is level plain with rich alluvial soil and has a slope from east to west. River Pampa separates this land into two. This region has the name from Pandavas the epic heroes of MahaBharatha who had their stay here during their exile. The locality where they stayed is known as Pandavapuram. The total geographical area is 10.41 sq. kms and an average of 2,636 mm of rain is received here annually. This region mainly concentrates on cultivation. Animal husbandry and fish farming are other agricultural activities. Brick construction, soil and sand collection and transport are the only manufacturing activities. No industrial units other than brick kilns exist in this panchayat. As per the 2001 Census, the population of the panchayat is 12,039; of these, 5,873 are men and 6,166 are women. The total schedule caste people living in this area amounted to 1,856. The soil in this region is suitable for farming coconut, banana, pepper, arecanut, sugarcane, pulses, paddy, cashew and tapioca. Such a cropping pattern for the region was recommended by the Soil Survey Organisation of Kerala. The Guru Chengannur Granthasala was established here in honour of Guru Chengannur, the famous Kathakali Acharyan . The panchayat has had a government hospital from early times. The hospital received a face lift and a return to discipline in the sixteen under the leadership of the then physician Dr.C.M.Eapen L. M. P.

Venmony Grama Panchayat

The total area of this panchayat is 18.01 sq. kms.⁶³ Its boundaries are Mulakuzha Panchayat in the north, River Achenkovil in the South, Cheriyanad in the West and Kulanata Panchayat of Pathanamthitta district in the East. It has 14 wards, Uliyenthra, Kodukulanji, Parachanda, Chandamala, Illathumepuram, Punthalikuzham, Pyka, Kakkada, Venmony Eram, Pulakadavu, Kalathra, Venmony and Venmony Thazham. The total population of this area is 20,266; of these 9,662 are men, 10,604 are women. The scheduled caste people are 3,716. 'Venmony' literally is a combination of two Malayalam words, 'Ven' and 'Mony'. 'Ven' means white, 'Mony' has two senses — pearl and grain. One view holds that the name has come from its scenic charm. Presumably it is prompted by the glittering morning dew drops on the leaves in the array of betel gardens here. Another view is that the name is derived from 'Ponmony' the vernacular reference being to the paddy grain. A third view is that it has come from the name of Venmony 'illam' (habitat) of the 'Venmony Nampoothiris' who were celebrated poets of Malayalam and pioneers of one school of poetry called 'Champu Kavya' which were predominantly amorous in content and diction.

Venmony grama panchayat promoted an agricultural society in the region through various schemes for household plantation, herbal plantation, banana plantation, control of pesticides, and small scale irrigation projects. Paddy cultivation in this area has been facing the problems of dearth of

⁶³ *Venmony Grama Panchayat Vikasana Seminar, 2000-2001, p.2*

labourers. Cattle rearing has been the most important project of this panchayat. Subsidies are given to encourage the farmers in rearing cattle. Main agricultural activities here are coconut cultivation, rubber plantation, paddy cultivation, vegetable cultivation and cattle rearing.

Cheriyamad Panchayat

Cheriyamad is a continuation of two Malayalam words ‘cheria’ and ‘nadu’ meaning small village which it actually is. It is supposed to be the birth place of Chengannur Kunjati, a heroic warrior of the past, a Paraya by caste.

The total area of this panchayat is 14 sq. kms. It has 14 wards: Edavankadu, Thirithimal, S.N. College ward, Cheriyamad, Mana, Alakode, Chevanadu, Cheruvalla, Gagukad, Kollakadavu, Karikad, Edamuri, Attimanjeri and Manda Pariyamans. Its boundaries are Puliyur panchayat in the north, Thazhakara panchayat in the south, Budhannur panchayat in the west and Ala Panchayat in the east.

Ernakulam Trivandrum railway⁶⁴ line passes through this panchayat. Sree Narayana College is a prominent institution in this area. It has a railway station.

Puliyur Panchayat

Puliyur grama panchayat is one of the major panchayats in Chengannur Taluk. It finds a place in history of a distant past. Nammalwar and Thirumakai Alwar (8th century A.D.) praised and created hymns about ‘Puliyur devan’.

⁶⁴ *Cheriyamad Grama Panchayat Padhathi Rekha, 2006, P..3*

Puliyur temple is also considered as one among the 108 divya kshetras of Vaishnavism. This temple centre is considered as a pilgrimage centre of Vaishnavites. One view is that Puliyur derived its name from Vakra Muni who practised asceticism here. Some others hold the view that it was a habitat of 'Puli' (leopard). It was a centre of Buddhism. Puliyur is also known as Vakrapuram.⁶⁵

Before the arrival of the 'Aryans', Puliyur was a centre of many kavus. Another notable feature of the past was that Puliyur 'Nagara' was under the control of Nattukuttam. Nattukuttam had independent power upon which the royal authority had no jurisdiction or power. Puliyur was known as a powerful 'Mukkal Vattam' area.

Its boundaries are Pandanad Panchayat in the north, Chengannur Municipality in the east, Budhanur panchayat in the west and Achenkovil River and Cherianad panchayats in the south. Its 12 wards together has an area of 11.9sq.kms.

The wards are Palachuvadu, Pazhayattil, Perissery North, Nootavanpara, Thingalamuttam, Madathumpadi, Puliyur East, Puliyur Central, Kulikampalam, Thonnakkad, Elanjimel and Puliyur West.

Its population is 17062 according to the Census of 2001. Of these men are 8005 and women 9057. Total houses numbered 4089. There are 2651 scheduled caste families. 2230 people live below the poverty line.

⁶⁵ *Puliyur Grama Panchayat Karshika Souvenir, 2005 P.12.*

Basically an agrarian village the panchayat has different types of soil. It has varying texture and fertility status. Topographically it has rocky patches, gentle slopes and level lands. River Achenkovil and the net work of PIP canals provide irrigation water to the farmers. Most areas are highly fertile, suitable for cultivation of many crops -- paddy, coconut, vegetables tuber crops, banana and a variety of other fruit crops.

The farmers of this panchayat are facing numerous problems. All are increasingly finding it difficult to make cultivation profitable. In the case of paddy high input cost, paucity of skilled labourers, irrigation and drainage problems, unexpected natural calamities etc. are some of them. Lack of proper drainage causes inundation compelling fallowing. Sand mining in the paddy fields is a matter of environmental concern nowadays. In the case of coconut cultivation the attack of mite, paucity of labourers for spraying pesticides and fine harvesting, low price for the produce etc. are some of the critical problems.

In order to make farming more profitable farmers go in for mixed crops. As the intercropping in coconut gardens, different crops like banana, vegetables, tuber crops, fruit crops, spices etc. are being cultivated by the farmers in this panchayat. Most of the farmers here are either small or marginal. In order to maintain a sustainable agriculture, specific emphasis is to be given to farm schemes generating ancillary income. These may include mulberry cultivation, mushroom cultivation, pisci culture, apiculture etc. Seri culture has much scope in this panchayat as the soil and climatic conditions are highly congenial for the cultivation of mulberry. The area under mulberry cultivation has increased in recent years. Various schemes in this respect have been taken advantage of by

the farmers and they have promoted expectations among the farmers of a higher level of returns. The grama panchayat has set apart a portion of the plan fund for the promotion of seri cultivation. The area gives great scope for intercropping, mixed cropping and new crops.