CHAPTER- II

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS OF KOLLAM DURING THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Medieval Kerala witnessed several socio-economic transformations due to the predominance of a more complex relation between the land and the people. In fact Kerala had one of the most complex agrarian systems in India. In the pre-colonial period economic and social status of a caste or a family or an individual was based on the nature of land rights they enjoyed. However the different interest groups in land shared the products of the soil on the basis of *maryada* (local customs and practices). In fact, the land ownership pattern and tenurial rights which existed in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar regions of Kerala had many common characteristics though they differed from one another in details.

In Travancore, there existed two broad categories of land ownership rights, *Pandaravaka* (state owned) and *Janmam* (land owned by Brahmins). These lands were cultivated by the tenants and agrestic slaves attached to the soil. Cochin also had the same pattern of land ownership. But in the Malabar region almost all land

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1 S. Ramachandran Nair, “Land Reforms and Agriculture in Kerala” in E.K.G. Nambiar, (ed.), *Agrarian India – Problems and Perspectives*, Calicut, 1999, p.120.

2 Agrestic Slavery could be defined as a socio-political structure existed in the rural areas that distinguished sharply between those who paid land taxes and the landless labourers who worked in the fields, with the latter being in positions of agrestic slavery. Agrestic slavery existed in Kerala as a part of the relations between the agricultural land and the people.
belonged to landlords; the four main groups associated with land were the landlords, Kanakkars (privileged tenants), the tenants (actual cultivators) and the agrestic slaves (tillers of the soil).

The agrarian society in Kerala had been developed by the end of 11th century. Food crop cultivation developed along the major river basins, and the cultivators were brought to subjection by the authority of the temple Uralar and non-brahmana territorial chiefs (utayavar).3 Political unity established by the ritual authority of the Perumal, and the sway of Brahmanical institutions and legal codes like Mulikkalam Kacchm completed the formation of the hierarchy of rights over land.

Interestingly, land transfers under the Ceras did not include food crop regions alone (mixed character of the lands, including waste lands and forests). Agriculture highly depended on natural water resources, including rivers, reservoirs and rainfall. Agriculture in the interior to a great extent depended on wells and natural water reservoirs. Agricultural implements including plough, hoe, spade etc. were being used4. Unsettled land brought under plough meant the transformation of major chunks of tribal population into peasants, resulting in considerable differentiation and social stratification.5

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Cultivation was conducted by the tenant settlers (kudiyar) and the bonded classes (adiyar). The term *adiyar* was used to include a number of groups such as Pulayar, Parayar, Cannar, Ilavar, involved in both food crop and cash crop cultivation. The practice of transferring the cultivators along with lands also continued.

As a result there emerged different categories of people with diverse types of hereditary rights on land. The most benefited were the landholders who were ensured of goods and services by the settlers in their land while the most exploited were the primary producers. The Brahmin settlements in Kerala which grew around the temples as agrarian corporations of a class of non-cultivating intermediaries placed above the cultivating peasantry were growing both in space and in the range of socio-economic activities.

Dues from the food crop lands were realised as a fixed share of the produce realised normally from each harvest. Territorial chiefs held lands or *cerikkals* and they were cultivated by tenants. The mode of payment of the share of the produce did not vary from other forms of payment to the overlord. *Attaikkol*, or the annual dues received by the ruler or his representative in Cera

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times, disappeared, where revenue forms existed, they were collected from each harvest, just as *melvaram* and *pattom*.\(^9\)

The gift of land was considered as a privilege of the king but later military chieftains and other feudatories, merchants and private individuals also granted land to temples. Interestingly, these lands were leased out to tenants for cultivation and the rent obtained from them was used to maintain the temple. In some cases the grantee was obliged to perform certain services in the temple and in default of which the land could be redeemed and transferred to another person.\(^10\)

Temple lands formed a unit under the organisation called *sanketam* which was developing from Cera times. In the post Cera period, most of the major temples had become Sanketams. The protection of the temple lands was in the hands of the non-brahmana body called *cangattam*, who received a share of the produce for their service called *kavalpanam* or *rakshabhoga*.\(^11\)

It is true that Peasants formed a major section of the population in medieval Kerala. There were substantial farmers who could hire labour and raise crops for the market. Paddy was the most important item of food crop, rice being the staple food of the people. However, the cultivation of paddy depended on various factors like the nature of the terrain, texture of the soil, facilities of water management


and so on. Moreover the upland areas of Venad could be cultivated with tank irrigation.12

In the medieval society the actual tillers of the soil belonged to the class of labourers. There was a group of peasants who were known as the growers of coconut. The most important among them were the Tiyas or the Ezhavas. Some of them cultivated their own land while others worked as hired labourers of the Nairs and Christians. Their principal profession seemed to be toddy drawing. Contemporary records describe that a member of the Ezhava caste polluted a Nambutiri from a distance of even thirty feet. He had no access to the house of Nairs or Nambutiris, their temples, tanks and wells and had no freedom to use the road or footpath when a Nair or a Nambutiri was nearby. The lower caste could only come within shouting distance of the Brahmins. 13 Those who polluted by approaching or touching temples, houses, tanks or roads belonging to the higher castes were awarded severe corporal punishments.14

The lower castes of Travancore were not permitted to use public roads open to the higher castes. They were not permitted to enter or approach within a certain distance of many courts and public offices.15 Literacy itself was the monopoly of the higher castes; the doors of self improvement were closed against the low

15 Ibid., pp. 35-36.
castes.\textsuperscript{16} A bath is obligatory on high caste Hindu event of any physical contact with the members of the low castes.\textsuperscript{17}

The rural population consisted of landless labourers including the untouchables such as the Cerumar, Vettuvas, Parayas, and Pulayas. Of these, the Pulayas and Vettuvas formed the most important groups of slave population. Though all adiyars were not agrestic slaves in general, this term was used to indicate the class of landless labourers.\textsuperscript{18} The agrestic slaves lived far away from the main habitat of the village in order to avoid pollution.

Barbosa refers to Poleas as residing in the fields as open campaigns in secret lurking places and the Parayas in the most desert places. Linschoten describes the conditions of Polias (Pulayas), as he found Nairs as high caste and Polias as low caste and Nairs could not be touched by Polias.\textsuperscript{19}

Agricultural operations as ploughing, sowing, manuring, weeding, transplanting, reaping and threshing were done by the slaves. It is true that once born to the parents of a slave class, a man was destined to lead the life and observe the class rules of the slaves throughout his life.


To a slave it was a life-long contract with his master to serve him, but the master could delegate the slave’s service or sell him at any a time. During the war time the captured people turned into slaves, like this during famines parents used to sell their children. Pulappedi and Mannappedi were the other factors that fostered slavery. Slavery for domestic and industrial labour and serfdom for agrarian work are both attested by the epigraphic records of the age.

Each land owning family possessed a number of families of agrestic slaves. The slaves were transferred with or without the land on which they toiled and moiled. For instance the Tharisappally Copper Plate refers to the transfer of slaves to the church of Sapir Iso. Thus, it can be seen that the institution of slavery attached to the land was a part of the social system of medieval Kerala particularly in Kollam.

From early time itself Kerala had international trade relations, and several writers recorded about the slave trade of Kerala with different parts of the world. Muscat had a fine harbour and was a centre of slave trade. Kollam had brisk

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21 A practice prevailed in medieval Kerala, a high caste woman will polluted by a glance or touch of a low caste man in night time in a particular season (pathamudayam). She was out from her caste.


trade with Muscat. Contemporary records say that six slaves include in the commodities exported from Kollam in the 16th century.\textsuperscript{25}

There were three modes of transferring the slaves. The first was \textit{janmam} or sale, where the full value was given and the property was entirely transferred to a new master. The second method was by \textit{kanam} or mortgage. The proprietor would get two thirds of the value of slaves, and a small quantity of rice yearly as a token of continuance of his partial claim over the slaves. The third way of employing slaves was by letting them for \textit{pattam} or rent.\textsuperscript{26}

In fact, the agrestic slaves were maintained by the landlord. They were fed at his cost the whole year round. They had the privilege to build their \textit{madam} (hut) and plant trees in the land of the landlord for which they were paid in kind. During the seasons of harvest the labourers received a portion of their hard work in the field. However the agrestic slaves did not possess the freedom to move from the land of their masters as they were attached to the soil.\textsuperscript{27} This immobility of the agrestic slaves who formed the backbone of the agrarian economy and the power of the land owning class over the means of production, exhibit the nature of a set up similar to feudal mode of production.

In addition to the agrestic slaves, there was yet another class of people who engaged in actual cultivation. To a great extent, they were hired labourers summoned in case of scarcity of workers by the agent of the landlord. They were

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temporary residents of the village who had left their home villages due to natural calamities such as famine and hence became migratory.28

Artisans and similar occupational groups on a greater level enjoyed a higher socio-economic status than adiyar. Carpenters, stonemasons, goldsmiths and other metal workers were traditionally used for the construction of temple, idols, and other metal works.29 Tachan and Thattan are belonging to Kammala or artisan group.30 Their importance is demonstrated by the presence of artisan streets in the different parts of Kerala. Kaniyan and Velan were considered as service groups.31 Benjamin of tudela records the importance of astrology in the life of the people of Kollam.32 It denotes the possibility of a strong social group of astrologers in Kollam. Veluthedar were washermen and Eruviyar in the Tharisappally Copper Plates were salt panning group.33

Coconut was an item for daily consumption as well as sale and export.34 Among the non-agricultural products the foremost in economic importance was coir. The native merchants in Calicut and Cochin contacted the coir manufactures in Kollam, Cranganore and Mattancherry for the sale of the commodity. It was of

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great demand after the arrival of the Portuguese in India as it was used in ship building. Coir, yarn and rope were both for their livelihood and sale.

The extraction of oil from *copra* was the principal profession of a large number of people in medieval Kerala in the sixteenth century. Coconut being exported from the ports of the west coast to places like Aden and Ormus.\(^{35}\) The increased demand for oil in Europe and elsewhere enhanced its production. It was the hereditary occupation of the *Cakkan* or *Vanian*. The *Cakkan* had to give a tax known as *cakku kadamai* to the local ruler of chieftain\(^{36}\).

Contemporary records reveal the existence of weavers in medieval Kerala. The *Patnuls* were specialists in lace cloths fringed with gold and silver.\(^{37}\) The *muri* and *thundu* (towel) made by them were in great demand. Of all the weaving groups, the *Caliyans* were the most prominent. The weaving groups had to pay loom tax. They lived in separate streets and worked as a team. Their largest concentration was in the region between Calicut and Cochin. They were also found in Kollam, Palghat and Cannanore. The craftsmen sold their products either through brokers or directly at the local fairs.

Kollam was in *naital* tinai and the main job is fishing and salt panning.\(^{38}\) Salt panning was an important economic activity of the coastal regions. This industry

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in Kerala was instrumental in developing exchange centres on the coast and it is reflected even to this day all along the coast in a large number of place names suggesting the areas of brine water, salt panning and storing.\textsuperscript{39}

Kollam had brisk trade with Coromandel, the chief item exported from there was rice. Palm candy, arecanut, coconut and coir produced in Malabar regions were in great demand in the Coromandel coast \textsuperscript{40} and traders took back cotton textiles from there. The Tamil merchants such as Cettis from Coromandel coast engaged in textile trade. According to Barbosa Cettis were very honourable people.\textsuperscript{41} Aryankavu pass to the east of Kollam was used to carry pepper to Tamil Nadu and bring rice back to Malabar. There was also connection from west coast to Coromandel via Palghat gap.\textsuperscript{42}

The transportation of commodities from Kollam to the entrepot was done both by land and river ways, goods were carried by pack animals such as buffaloes. The traders of Kollam brought cotton from Coimbatore and Madhurai. Kottar, the capital of Nanjinadu, was the distribution centre of rice from Nanjinadu.\textsuperscript{43}

Gradually trade and commerce began to develop in medieval Kerala. As a result of the rise of towns and cities and due to further increase in population, demand


\textsuperscript{40} Johnsy Mathews, \textit{Op.cit.}, p.159.


\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ibid.}, p.160.

for commodities began to increase and the cities of medieval Kerala also began to
enlarge into international trading centers. Among such cities, Kollam occupied a
prominent position as it was the cradle of transmarine contacts.

Historical records say that, Kollam shares fame with Kodungallur as a sea
port on the Malabar Coast of India from early centuries of the Common Era.
Towards the ninth century, the countries of Southern Asia had developed an
extensive maritime and commercial activity, and as a result started attaining
prosperity. The T’ang Empire in China, Sri Vijaya under the powerful line of the
Sailendras, and the Abbasid Khalifat at Baghdad were the chief states outside
India where this had been flourished.44

Kulam Malay (Kulam Mali) or Kollam (Malibarat in the Genizza papers)
had already expanded into the principal port, as a result of the new port-hierarchy
that emerged in the eighth and ninth centuries. Kollam figures in the accounts of
foreign travellers as an important port of Malabar Coast. Friar Odoric, in his travel
accounts, wrote about Polumbum (Kollam), and its pepper.45 The situation of
Kollam is favorable from the facility of communication with other countries both
by sea and land.46 Kollam was the chief port of the Pandyas on the West Coast

45 Henry Yule & Henri Cordier, (trans. & ed.) Cathay and the Way Thither, Vol.II, New Delhi,
p.129.
46 Lieutenants Ward and Conner, Memoir of the Travancore and Cochin States, Vol.2, Trivandrum,
p.73.
and was connected with Korkai (Kayal) port on the East Coast and also through land route over the Western Ghats.

The long distance sea trade which had become very frequent by this time with al-Basrah or Muscat or Sohar in Oman as the starting point and Canton in China as the terminal point helped the emergence of Kollam or Kulam Malay as the main halt in Malabar for the Arab sea men who had to break their voyages for want of favourable monsoon and change of shipping.47

The names under which early writers have noticed the port, Kollam seem to vary very much. Cosmas (6th century) calls it Male; Solyman (851), Koulam Malay; Genizza papers (9th till 13th centuries) refer to it as Koulam Mali; Benjamin of Tudela (1166), Chulam, the Chinese annals quoted by Pantheir in his edition of Marco Polo Kiualan; Abulfeda (1273), Kollam or Coilum, Marco Polo (1298), Rashiduddin (1300), and Wassaf (1310), Kulam, Friar Odoric (1322), Polumbum; Jordanus (1328), Columbum.48 Ibn Batuta (1343) Kawlam;49 John Marignolli (1348), Columbum; Nicolo Conti(1430), Coloen; Varthema (1510), Colon,50 Barbosa (1516), Coulam, and G.D. Empoli (1530), Colam. In Malayalam the town is known as Kollam. Abulfeda and Odoric describe the position of the place

50 John Winter Jones (trans.), The Itinerary of Ludovico Di Varthema of Bologna, From 1502 to 1508, New Delhi, 1997, p.61.
as at the extreme end of Balad-al-Falfal, i.e., the pepper country or “Malabar” and as ‘at the extremity of the pepper forest towards the south’. Ibn Khurdadbhih, in his work *Al Masalik Wal Mamalik* speaks about ‘Mulay’ which has been identified as Kaulam Mali. It is mentioned by most of the Arab and Persian sailors of the ninth century under the name of Kawlam Malay.

Kollam produced great deal of brazil which is called *brazil coilmum*. The brazil wood of Kaulam appears in the commercial handbook of Pegolotti (c.1340) as *Verzino Colombino*, and the same name in that of Giov. D’Uzzano, a century later. Pegolotti, in one passage details all kinds of brazil under the names of *Verzino salvatico*, *dimestico* and *colombino*. In another passage, where he enters into particulars as to the respective values of different qualities, he names three kinds, as *Colomni, Ameri* and *Seni*, of which the *Colomni* (*Colombino*) was worth a sixth more than the *Ameri* and three times as much as *Seni*. Ameri may stand for Lameri referring to Lambri in Sumatra; and perhaps *Seni* is *Sini* or Chinese, indicating an article brought to India by the Chinese traders, probably from Siam. Good ginger also produced here, and it is known by the same name of ‘Coilmum’

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after the country. Pepper too produced in great abundance throughout this country.\textsuperscript{56}

The Arab geographer Al-Kazwini in 1263 described Kollam, as one with magnificent markets and wealthy traders.\textsuperscript{57} From Sulyman’s account it becomes clear that one month’s sail from Muscat brought the ships to Koulam, a little to the north of Cape Comorin, and at that time the most considerable port of southern India. He started for India from the Persian Gulf, sailing with the monsoon.\textsuperscript{58}

Historical records provide details about the period of Cola greatness, South India looked across the sea for its political activities. A hundred years of overseas expansion and rival warfare by the Colas are striking features of South Indian history. In fact, the peak of naval glory came with the later Colas in the eleventh century A.D. Later, Rajendra led an expedition of conquest across the southern Bay to Sri Vijaya Empire of Sumatra and Malaya coasts.\textsuperscript{59} Apart from the policies of kings and dynasties the people of peninsular India were more concerned with maritime activity than with political expansion of the Nanadesis, the Valangai and Edangai\textsuperscript{60}.

Marco Polo testifies to the presence of many ships at the harbour of Saitun destined for Kollam. He describes the products exported from this town

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p.375.

\textsuperscript{57} The Hindu, Friday, October, 19, 2007, p.4.

\textsuperscript{58} R.H.Major, India in the Fifteenth Century, Reprint, New Delhi, 1992, p.xxv.


\textsuperscript{60} K.M. Panikkar, Geographical Factors in Indian History, Bombay, 1959, p.42.
especially brazil wood, pepper and indigo. At that time Kollam was the international capital for spice trade especially pepper, cardamom, and ginger.\textsuperscript{61}

Ibn Battuta, the 14\textsuperscript{th} century traveller, describes Kollam as one of the most beautiful places in Malabar with magnificent bazaars. He further notes that merchants of the town are so wealthy that one of them could buy a ship with everything in it. John De Marignolli who lived for fourteen months at Kollam, characterises it as ‘a very noble city where the whole world’s pepper is produced’.\textsuperscript{62}

In the process of Islamic political and commercial expansion, the Christian merchants who used to conduct in the former Sassanid territories, particularly in the Persian Gulf region, had to move over to safer destinations, where the Persian traders had already established contacts.

It is against this historical background that Mar Sapor and Mar Prodh seem to have reached Kerala, which had earlier been an important commercial destination for the Christian merchants from Sassanid Persia. When they came to Kollam, they carried along with them an extensive network of commerce that the Sassanid merchants developed over centuries and they made use of these mercantile connections for keeping the wheels of commerce move around the Tharisappally of Kollam\textsuperscript{63}.

\textsuperscript{61} The Hindu, Friday, October 19, 2007, p.4.


\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., p.217.
After having carried out trade for 26 years in Kollam, Mar Sapor managed to obtain a set of commercial and economic privileges from the local ruler Ayyanadikal Thiruvadikal (849 A.D.) legitimizing the claim of the Tharisappally over overseas trade as well as control over the weights and measures of the city, besides bagging several tax collecting rights over the divers settlers coming under this church, by way of the grant. The most important among the privileges that the church obtained was the right to keep ‘parakkol’, ‘pancakandy’, ‘kappan’ (different types of weights and measures) of the city of Kollam under its safe custody, which this community enviously held till 1503, when these were taken away from them following the malpractices done with them by some of its trading members. This shows that Tharisappally was not mere a centre of worship, but represented a corporate body of traders that ensured standardization of the weights and measures of the city and maintained the integrity of trade. Slave tax shall not be imposed on the slaves bought by the church.

It is worth noting that these gifts and economic privileges were given after a gap of 26 years from the time of the arrival of Mar Sapor is evidently indicative of the fact that they were granted not at their very first sight, but having tested the worth and utility of the recipients, of both the church and the immigrant Christian merchant community in the process of resource mobilization. In fact the

commercial privileges were a reward for the activation of sizeable share of trade surplus into coffers of the rulers as *kopathavaram* (share of the King Sthanu Ravi Varma) and *pathipathavaram* (share of the local ruler-Ayyanadikal).

The Syrian Copper Plates of Kollam, refer to the transfer of families to the church of Tharisa. Four families of Ilavar, with four females and eight males making a total of twelve persons, and one family of Vannar, were made over to the church in the fifth year of Sthanu Ravi. The governor handed over to it the right to collect a wide variety of taxes from them, which Ayyanadikal used to levy earlier like *thalaikkanam*, *enikkanam* (professional taxes from toddy tappers and tree climbers), *manai meypan kollum ira* (housing tax), *cantan mattu meni ponnu* (tax for using the title chantan- channan or shanar- to show his high social status), *polipponnum* (tax given on special occasions), *iravucorum* (balikaram or tax collected to feed the Brahmins, refugees and destitute), and *kudanazhiyum* (collection of a nazhi- a type of liquid- measurement) of toddy as tax from each pot tapped.

Moreover the churchmen might collect eight *kasu* from each cart that used to take merchandise by land into the market of Kollam (vayinam) and four *kasu* from each boat that was used to carry cargo to the port (vediyilum). The Ilavar were permitted to bring their vehicles to the bazaar and ply their business and Vannan was also permitted to do his work in the bazaar. These gifts and

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privileges were given to strengthen and empower the mercantile Christian community that in turn would emerge as a sufficiently capable agent for mobilizing resources for trade and for bringing wealth to empower the state.

Mar Sapir Iso was described there as the founder of the Nagaram, Kollam. The port city of Kollam was there even before and it was the possibilities of trade that attracted most of the foreign groups to that place. But the port city of Kollam began to develop 9th century onwards (at the time of the arrival of Mar Sapir). But the trading organizations of Sapir helped very much for the development of Kollam. It was the trading networks that carried along them caused for this development.

When kings and chieftains founded a new township the usual practice was to invite some traders and skilled workers, and by giving them attractive terms and special privileges, induce them to settle down in the new place. It is not surprising that the Cera king who was contemplating the development of a new harbour town at Kurakkeni Kollam welcomed the foreigner and granted his petition permitting him to settle down at the new harbour site.

This was the period when the Cera-Pandya conflict was developing in the south. The Pandyas had invaded the Ay-vel country and captured the Vel king along with his relatives and treasures. The Cera army had moved into the south in reply to this and it was involved in military action in the vicinity of the Ay 72

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70 M.G.S. Narayanan, Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala, Trivandrum, 1972, p.32.

71 Ibid., p.32.

72 Ay kingdom was a strong ruling power of Medieval Kerala.
headquarters of Vilinjam (Vizhinjam) for some time. Subsequent developments prove that the Ay country with its old headquarters in Vilinjam was retained within the Pandyan sphere of influence while the Vel country with its new headquarters at Kurakkeni Kollam became a division of the Cera Kingdom.

It is easy to understand the anxiety of the Cera king to please foreign merchants with concessions and settle them at Kollam so that the harbour might grow quickly, and compete effectively with Vilinjam further south which had passed under the control of the Pandya. As a result the protecting power of Vilinjam became weak and Kollam became prominent.

The Cera king tried for the commercial prosperity and gave patronage to their alien religion, Syrian Christians. This incident to a great extent reveals the practical wisdom of the rulers and throws light on the economic – political motivations of men which promoted the spread of ideas, religions and culture. The kings leaned heavily on foreign traders to ensure the prosperity of the port settlements that contributed substantially to their exchequers, and for imports.

The Cera rulers had to increasingly depend on the foreign merchants for obtaining domestic and foreign merchants required for meeting the diverse needs of the state as well as for getting the hands of the rulers strengthened, by way of customs collections. The Brahmin settlements and trade and craft-guilds were the

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basic units of the Cera agrarian society and polity. The encouragement, given to Christian traders by way of privileges, is to be viewed also as an attempt to strike at the roots of the Buddhists and Jains, against whom the Brahmanical religion started a crusade from 6th-7th centuries onwards. Empowering Christian traders was an alternative device to weaken the trade of the Buddhists and the Jains as it was the surplus from their trade that held the ideology of both religions in a hegemonic position.

Buddhism had great influence in Venadu. Al kazwini and Al-Biruni (10th-11th centuries) record the presence of Buddhism in Kollam. Buddha images were discovered from Pallikkal (Kunnathur taluk). It was seated on the bank of a tank locally known by the name of Pallikkal-kulam. Marudukulangara in the Karunagappally taluk of Kollam was another centre of Buddhism and Chitaral was a Jain centre. Srimulavasam Buddhist temple (vihara) was granted landed property by Vikramadithya Varaguna of 9th century. By 8th century, Saivaits and Vaishnavaits became powerful. Temples began to develop as a part of this social development. In 1439, Sankaranarayana temple was built by Rama Marthanda

77 Puthussery Ramachandran Nair, Kerala Charithrathinte Adisthanarekhakal, Trivandrum, State Institute of Languages, 2007, p.xxxiii.
Varma, at Navaykulam, south of Kollam. Here both Siva and Vishnu shares equal importance.⁷⁹

In fact, the Syrian Christian merchants who took advantage of the situation were equally clever and resourceful. They knew that the best opportunity for foreigners in this country lay in the field of sea-trade as the Brahmanical Hindus were by temperament allergic to the sea and left such professions either to the lower castes or to the foreigners. As a result trade was mutually beneficial to the Syrian settlers and consequently their Kerala hosts and trade contacts naturally facilitated the study of languages and customs and the development of mutual confidence which could prepare the ground for missionary work.

The immigrant Christian traders were involved chiefly in the urbanization process of their settlements, principally of Cranganore (Mahodayapuram) and Kurakkeni Kollam. By the time of Cosmas Indicopleustes (c.535 A.D.) there was in ‘Male’ a large “congregation of believers” and clergy ecclesiastically connected with Persia.⁸⁰

Sassanid Persia was famous for urban culture and its emigrants used to carry elements of urban culture wherever they went. The culture of clustered living and trading activities, symbolized by ‘angadis’ started appearing in Kerala for the first time with the advent of immigrant Christian merchants from West

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Asia. Most of these ‘angadis’ were located around churches and formed the nuclei out of which vibrant urban centers developed in later period in central Kerala. It seems that Kollam’s urbanization process also started almost in the same way. The initial market centre seems to have eventually developed into a town with the clustering of people following the intensification of maritime trade. Several writers have associated the town of Kollam with the origin of the Kollam era which began in A.D. 825.

The Ilavar settled on church land were toddy-tappers as *talaikkanam* and *enikkanam* (fetter fee and ladder fee) are mentioned in connection with them. Their right to bring the wagon to the bazaar and the fort is also mentioned. The Vannars were probably carrying on the traditional occupation of washer man. They also practiced the tailor’s art and their womenfolk were midwives in the rural society. The Tachar were carpenters and Vellalar were cultivators of the soil.

Probably the opening part of the second charter also contained a reference to Vaniyar-oil mongers- as the subsequent passage mentions the supply of oil for the use of the church. The Vellalar must have cultivated paddy in the compound, and the Vaniyar, Vannar and Tachar must have supplied the skilled labour in the respective fields to the churchmen.

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The governor also authorised the church to exercise judicial powers with respect of the settlers. Revenue and judicial authority, the essential attributes of government, were passed on to the church. It is specifically stated here that the church was to exercise judicial power over the settlers and also to collect birth tax and marriage tax from them. Along with Arunurruvar; Anjuvannam and Manikkiramam shared the responsibility of ensuring the safety of the church and church property.83 The Arunurruvar were the organization of ‘the Six Hundred’-forming the standing army of the governor.

Later, the emergence of the temple to the pivotal position by organizing contemporary economic activities of the hinterland affected the exchange pattern. Reciprocity of goods and services, the temple centred redistribution and the characteristic localisation brought into existence a new exchange set up in the hinterland.84 These changes brought about similar developments in contemporary commerce too.

Merchants were generally organized in powerful guilds and corporations which often transcended political divisions and were therefore not much affected by the wars and revolutions going on about them.85 Moreover the most celebrated guilds from fairly early times were the Manigramam and the Nanadesis or Ainnurruvar. It is true that the Ainnurruvar or the five hundred figures

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prominently in most of the records, some 46 different groups are noticed in
association with them at various centres and in different contexts.\(^{86}\)

There were merchants of the home country (svadesabharulu), merchants of
another country (paradesa- beharulu), and merchants from different countries
(nanadesis).\(^{87}\) The first were the local merchants organized in local guilds-
nagarams. The second were like the first except that they came from another
country. The last were the powerful guilds which included merchants from all
countries, with established branches in all of them, and perhaps playing a
prominent part in the foreign trade of the country as a whole.

Dr. Gundert\(^{88}\) and Burnell understood Anjuvannam referred to the colony
of the Jews and Manigramam to that of Christians.\(^{89}\) Manigramam is referred to in
the ninth century Syrian Christian Copper Plates. The contents of this inscription
indicate that the Manigramam association was undoubtedly a merchant guild.
Interestingly the plates illustrate the emergence of Manigramam as an
administratively autonomous guild with Kollam, as its regional base of
operation.\(^{90}\)

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\(^{86}\) R. Champakalakshmi, “The Medieval South Indian Guilds: Their Role in Trade and
Urbanization” in Ranabir Chakrabarti (ed.), *Themes in Indian History- Trade in Early India*,
New Delhi, 2001, p.327.


\(^{88}\) Gundert contributed very much to the Malayalam language.


The evidence that this corporation of merchants was functioning at this port, at that time, needs to be viewed on its wider context as part of a larger pattern of overland and maritime commercial activity which included areas bordering that the Persian Gulf and the Arabian peninsula, parts of north-west India, the east and west coast of India, Sri Lanka, some parts of south Burma, the Thai-Malaysian peninsula and many areas of South east Asia and China.91

In the Kottayam Copper Plates of Sthanu Ravi both Anjuvannam and Manigramam are frequently mentioned. They were to “preserve the proceeds of the customs duty as they were collected day by day” and to receive the landlord’s portion of the rent on land”92. If the church of Tharisa has any complaint, the Anjuvannam and Manigramam shall even suspend the payment of tolls, customs duties and sales taxes, and settle the complaint.93 If the Anjuvannam and Manigramam which are entrusted with the protection of the guild commit any crime, it shall be remedied by themselves.94

Moreover the Sthanu Ravi plates have append a list of signatures of witnesses in three languages, in Arabic, using the Kufi fleuri script of the ninth to tenth century and in the Pahlavi95 and Hebrew scripts. In fact the use of the Syriac

91 Meera Abraham, Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India, New Delhi, 1988, p.9.
92 Epigraphia Indica, Vol.IV (1896-97), New Delhi, 1979, p.293.
94 Ibid., p.375.
95 The presence of Pahlavi shows its influence in medieval Kerala society. It was used for writing inscriptions and in the churches.
titles for Maruvan Sapir Iso and the use of Arabic, Pahlavi and Hebrew scripts are in conformity both with the traditional Kerala accounts of church history and also with the East Syrian ecclesiastical tradition with its known links with Persia.96

Historical evidences prove that the port of Kollam is frequently mentioned in Arab works as the main halt for Arab seamen on the way to South-East Asia and China. The Kollam record is therefore not merely evidence of emigration led by Christians, but is to be seen also as the movement of a Christian group with trading interests to a port that was rapidly becoming a major Asian entrepot.97

Tharisappally Copper Plates offer more details on the land grant made to the Tharisappally showing that the Tharisappally had as its boundaries cultivated land on one side, the back waters of Kollam, and the fort in another side, the sea to the west and northeast the land belonging to two local families mentioned by name.

The Sthanu Ravi plates undoubtedly indicate a close connection between the Manigramam and the Christian community. In the late nineteenth century Manigramakar were still to be found at places in Kerala such as Kollam, Kayamkulam and Kattamarrom (Kadamuttam) and they appeared even then to have had ties with the Syrian church which they were anxious to break. As late as the mid-nineteenth century the manigramakkar at Kayamkulam were obliged to pay fees to the church on the occasion of a marriage. The Sthanu Ravi plates suggest the church sponsored and engaged in trade and in particular overseas


97 Ibid., p.22.
trade. It is evident that the fixing of the prices of commodities and every other business of the king should be done only with the help of the people of the church.

The privilege of weighing and the right to the "weighment charges" given to Maruvan Sapir Iso apparently continued to be held by the Syrian Christians for many centuries, but by the time the Portuguese came they no longer held the "seal and the standard weight of the city".

At Kollam, a well defined local infrastructure existed capable of dealing with overseas trade. Warehousing, protection, and the regulation of levies and taxes were prescribed in an agreement made between the foreign traders and the Manigramam and the king. At Kollam the Manigramam received their mandate from the king. The merchant guild, Manigramam had its branches all over South India.

Interestingly, the second portion of the Talekkad inscription mentions two members of the Manigramam, who were given the right to set up ships in the market and were exempted from certain specific taxes. The taxes which irrespective all the merchants had to pay include ulgu, the tax on overseas trading commodities. It was also stated in the inscription that local people were free to buy in the market.

There is evidence that medieval maritime trade was not confined to the simple exchange of the native products of one country for the produce of the other

99 Ibid., p.28.
trade partner. Moreover foreign commodities were bought at rates fixed; one is led to believe, by the exigencies of supply and demand. The payments may have been in other commodities considered to be of adequate value at the time of sale, or in coined gold, or bullion, or in other acceptable coinage. Jewish sources reveal exchanges in terms of money. Some proportion of the foreign commodities after purchase may have found their way into the local markets but some of it was probably transported along with other ‘native’ products to other overseas markets for re-sale.

To a great extent, the trading activities of Kerala, towards close of the first millennium, were organized mainly under the umbrella of the Ceras and their feudatories. Historically, it was done chiefly with a view to bagging wealth for countering the commercial and political expansionist moves of the later Colas. However, various stone and copper plate inscriptions dating to Cola times suggest that there was considerable commercial activity in the South Indian hinterland and

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104 Ibid.
that well organized commercial networks supplied the commodities demanded by the foreign traders.\textsuperscript{105}

While the Colas attempted to monopolize the trading activities of South East Asia by controlling exchange centers of Ceylon, Coromandal Coast and the Sailendras, the Cera rulers. Moreover their feudatories made increasing use of Manigramam and Anjuvannam merchant guilds of Kerala that had links with the ports of Persian Gulf and Red sea, for controlling the commercial affairs of the west coast of India, particularly of Kerala. The region from Tanur to Kollam depended on Coromandel for rice.

Against the context of Cera-Cola conflict many foreign merchants wanted to keep themselves closer to Cera rulers by donating liberally for meeting the expenses incurred in war. This was an easy way of keeping the merchant communities acceptable to the ruler. And such a linkage was thought to ensure enormous amount of commercial privileges to them in return. A development of this nature is inferred from the commercial privileges conferred by the king Rajasimhan (1028-1043A.D.) on the local Christian traders like Chathan Vadukan and Iravi Cathan, who were members of the \textit{Manigramam} merchant guild, as is evident from the Thalekkadu inscription.\textsuperscript{106}


\textsuperscript{106} A. Sreedhara Menon, \textit{Kerala Charitram}, DC.Books, Kottayam, 1973, p.135. The grant made to these two Christian merchants was recorded in the form of a \textit{vattezhuthu} inscription on a granite slab, 74 inches by 51 inches, lying at the foot of the open air cross in front of the Catholic church at Thalekkadu near Irinjalakuda.
Thus we can see that a state based on mutual good will and co-operation of all classes of its people can attain political and economic progress. In the case of Kollam, it is proved by the peaceful co-existence of various religious sects and their economic and cultural contributions for the development of the port city as a major centre of maritime trade and cultural exchange.

The contributions made by different trade guilds had been acting as a powerful element in the process of such a development. It was the different trading groups that settled in Kollam made possible the socio-economic development of the port city. Consequently, Arabs, Jews and Christians from different part of the world became an essential part of the society, economy and culture of Kollam.

With the increasing demand for spices, more land brought under cultivation by the indigenous Christians. New settlements of Christians established in the inland-agrarian pockets and gradually churches also erected.\(^{107}\) A strong rapport developed between the agriculturists and traders. With the support of the spice producing indigenous Christians from the hinterland, the commercially oriented migrating Christians from West Asia started focusing on maritime trade.\(^{108}\)

The social customs and practices of Kerala were observed by the Christians, *pula*, *sradham*, untouchability etc. observed by them. The St.Thomas Christians of Kollam followed the model of temple architecture in the construction of their churches. The cross

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from Kollam had a basement with space for pouring oil and lighting lamps.\textsuperscript{109} Kerala society accepted the food habit and dress pattern of the Christians who came from West Asia.\textsuperscript{110}

It is believed that Malik Dinar and his followers visited some of the harbour towns in Kerala and built the first mosque of Kerala in Cranganore and later built other mosques at Matayi and Kasargod. Sheik Zeinuddin records that a party of foreign Muslims entered some of the sea-ports of Malabar and settled there. In course of time, the inhabitants of these towns began to embrace Islam day by day. Islam spread all over the region. In those days, they did not face any kind of opposition or oppression from the non-Muslim rulers who were then in power.\textsuperscript{111}

Later, a group of Muslims came to the seaport of Kollam with Malik bin Dinar and Malik bin Habib and they settled there.\textsuperscript{112}

The descendants of these first immigrants were known with the title of Mappilas who extended their settlements to several harbour towns of Malabar Coast. When Calicut became a prominent maritime trade centre during the end of the 14\textsuperscript{th} century the Mappilas and the Arabs became a potential merchant class in the town with substantial economic resources. They enjoyed the lion share of the maritime trade in Calicut.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., p.49.

\textsuperscript{110} The food items like \textit{kallappam}, \textit{avalosepodi}, \textit{accappam} etc. influenced by Kerala society. Like that the use of dress like \textit{chatta} and \textit{mundu} with \textit{jnori} and \textit{neriyuthu} were the result of West Asian contacts.


\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p.32.
Pliny extensively records that a large number of Arabs had settled along the Malabar Coast. Thus the other port towns where the Muslims dominated are Konkan, in particular, supplied a massive amount of teakwood which seems to have been indispensable to the Arabs for construction purposes, especially ship-building. The navigational skills of Arab and Persian ship-masters in the period preceding the sixteenth century are well recorded.\textsuperscript{113}

Unlike the Romans, the Muslim traders who came to South India settled down permanently. From Ibn Battuta’s description, it is evident that Muslims were present in every major ports of Malabar during his time and that, like their ancestors, they kept arriving from the Persian Gulf and South Arabia. The Arab and Persian ships customarily stopped at Kollam to take local spices and to obtain Chinese merchandise. Kollam sent commercial missions to the court of Kublai Khan in 1282.

Historical evidences prove that the Arab economic success in the early caliphate period was achieved with the aid of the skills possessed by the people of the ancient Near East. But the growth of the great urban centres, a universal feature of Islam, and the new capital cities gave rise to an expanding demand for commodities of all kinds and for precious objects. This in turn quickened the pace of long distance trade.

It is worth noting that the laws of commercial contracts and the principles of juridical rights which evolved in the centuries following the

foundation of Islam took into account a cardinal fact of pre-modern trade. Thus the strong cultural and religious ties that had existed between South East Asia, India, and Ceylon all through the Hindu and Buddhist periods were of course modified and enlarged when Islamic influence spread eastwards across the Indian Ocean.

Interestingly, Indian ritual and royal court traditions had spread as far as ancient Siam and Cambodia. The commodities involved in maritime trade in the Indian Ocean may be divided into various broad categories such as aromatics, medicines, dyes and spices; foodstuffs, wood and textiles; gems and ornaments; metals; and plant and animal products.

Within hundred years Islam had spread over major portions the patronage of Abbasid Caliphate, art, industry and trade flourished in Islamic cities. Baghdad was visited by traders from remote countries, information could be exchanged easily due to the popularity of paper, the spread of writing and the use of a common language and hence Islamic geographers’ knowledge of the various customs and products of different lands was very good.

As described by Marco Polo, Mahabalipuram, Kaveripattinam, Shaliyur and Korkai on the east coast of India and Kollam on the west coast controlled the seaborne trade to the East and West. In fact, Siraf on the Persian Gulf was the entrepot of the westward trade reaching up to Persia and Arabia. Horses in large

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numbers were imported into South India from Arabia and Persia as noted by Marco Polo.\textsuperscript{115}

Studies give ample evidence that Kollam was the chief destination for the Christian immigrants from Persia in the beginning of the ninth century A.D., where they mobilized maritime trading activities around the Tharisappally. This church turned out to be the principal mobilizing force behind the long-distance maritime trade conducted between Kerala and West Asia\textsuperscript{116}.

It was historically proven that the Arab conquest of Sassanid Persia, Egypt and Sind gave them the control of a long area of strategic seaboard including the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea and through them the approaches to the Mediterranean. In the ninth century there were records of long voyages made by Arabs which, with halts and possible changes of shipping, terminated in Canton. The long Arab route is described in the work the ‘Ahbar as sin wal-Hind’. The sailings commenced at Muscat or Sohar in Oman and ships went straight to Kulam Mali which has been identified with Kollam in Kerala.

The barrier of pollution separated not only Muslims from Hindus but also imposed itself upon the relations of upper and castes, including all agricultural labourers who worked the land of high caste owners. The ritual seclusion of women was quite strong among the Nairs and Nambutiris. Women of these two castes could not enter the trading towns without becoming polluted. Such caste structures reinforce the social isolation of the Hindus. The agrarian economy and


\textsuperscript{116} Pius Malekandathil, “Christians and the Cultural Shaping of India”, p.8.
society eventually were to become entirely dominated by the Nambutiri brahmans and the Nairs but neither of these castes was directly involved in commerce.

Since the eighth to eleventh centuries were a period of expansion of Muslim commerce on all main routes of the Indian Ocean. Trading posts and colonies proliferated along the coasts and the river estuaries to sustain the newly evolving networks. In the eighth and ninth centuries the Indian Ocean became very much an ‘Arab Mediterranean’, and the Arab or Muslim diaspora along the coasts became predominant. The Arab merchants had established their contact with trade guilds like Anjuvannam and Manigramam in Kerala. They mainly exported great quantity of spices from Malabar.

Christians and Mappilas developed as the trading communities of Kerala. As a trading class they strengthened themselves in the coastal belt as well as in the hinterland. They could achieve a prominent place in the village markets and trade centres with the active support of the local rulers and landlords. Along with this progress in different localities they built mosques and strengthened their social organisations.

The local Hindus warmly accepted merchants and sailors of other nationalities and the Arabs in turn reciprocated by a non-aggressive policy. Thus there were Arabs sailing back and forth between Arabia and Kerala at the time of the prophet. Some of them were domiciled in the major ports, and inter

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Marriage is going on. Even before the advent of Islam in the seventh century A.D., the Arabs had established close trade relations with Western Indian ports. Further the advent of Islam and the missionary zeal of the new religion were greatly responsible to make these contacts cordial and fruitful for both sides.

The Tharisappally Copper Plate grant had mentioned some of the prominent Muslim merchants of the port town. Their names are written in Kufi character. Abu Zayd, a noted Arab traveller of the 9th century A.D. described that, the Arab of Umman (Oman) take the carpenter’s tool box with them and go to the place where the coconut (trees) grow in abundance. They weave rope of coir with this they tie the planks, together and make them a vessel and when the boat is ready they take a cargo of coconuts and sail for Umman.  

During Ibn Battuta’s stay in Kollam, envoys from the imperial court of China arrived in town. They had been shipwrecked, and the resident Chinese merchants provided them with clothes to continue the return journey to China. That the Muslim population in Malabar continued to prosper is also testified by Ma Huan. This Arabic speaking interpreter accompanied some of the Ming maritime voyages organised by Cheng Ho.  

It is very interesting to note that the trading activities in Kerala done with a reciprocity of different communities. Actually the growers of the pepper were mostly Hindus, but the initial purchasers were St. Thomas Christians. They sold it

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120 Ibid.
122 Ibid., p.99.
to the Muslim traders who traditionally handled this trade and the Muslims sold it to the Portuguese and the other exporters. The Portuguese were largely dependent for their pepper cargoes on their supposed inveterate enemies, the Muslims.

Along with traders, the religion of Islam also came to Kerala. The people of Yaman and other communities from Arabia who came to Kerala were traders. As they belonged to cultured tribes of Arabia a new culture and religion of Islam were introduced in Kerala on mutual understanding and religious tolerance, patriotism and culture in Kerala.

Oppana (a dance form) and several other items are mere imitation and modification of folk items of Hindu community. The performance of Oppana is highly indebted to a folk item exclusively performed by the Hindu women folk named after ‘Thiruvatirakkali’. The clapping and the movement in a circle along with the gay recitation of the folk song are the main characteristics of both items. In the folk songs of Oppana, more Arabic and Persian vocabulary is used along with Malayalam words.

Interestingly, the classical theatres of Kerala, Koodiyattam and Kathakali had borrowed at least some items of costumes from the Arabs and the local Mappilas. The female costumes in Kathakali are actually the same dress as used by Mappila women. The dress known as ‘kuppayam’ was a forbidden thing for a high caste

123 M.N. Pearson, Coastal Western India, New Delhi, 1987, p.29.
125 Ibid., 99.
126 Ibid., p.90.
woman of Kerala who kept her upper part naked. Therefore, the model was taken from the Mappila womenfolk.

The policy of the rulers in traditional Kerala was to encourage all religious communities and they were quite liberal in their attitude towards religious groups other than their own. The Muslims and their trade prospered because of this great tolerance of the local rulers. They did not treat the Muslims in any way hostile or unfriendly.\textsuperscript{127}

The unbelievers never punish such of their countrymen who embrace Islam, but treat them with the same respect shown to the rest of Muslims, though the convert belongs to the lowest of grades of their society. As a result of such kindly treatment, Muslim merchants used to come in large numbers.

The aromatic goods of India, teak wood, peacock, fine textiles and other oriental curiosities found their way to the distant parts of Europe much prior to the rise of Islam through west Asian regions especially Red Sea and Persian Gulf. After a setback for a couple of centuries in this relation on account of political instability, the flow of commodities was revived in the wake of the domination of Islam over some parts of Africa and West Asia.\textsuperscript{128}

Like Syrian Christians, the Muslims were also generally accorded ‘respectable’ status by Hindus and their interests were primarily commercial and a spirit of friendly co-operation prevailed between Jew, Muslim, Hindu and


Christian and between the free merchants and their bond servants who served as their agents.\textsuperscript{129}

The Jews who settled along the west coast of India must have been the intermediaries in the Jewish trade between Malabar and the west. The trading centres of Kerala such as Cranganore, Kollam, Pantalayani-Kollam, Matayi, Mala, Angamali, Chennamangalam and Cochin had scattered Jewish settlements.\textsuperscript{130} The Hebrew signature in Tharisappalli Copper Plate indicates their relation with Kollam anjuvannam, which is considered as the trade group of Jews.\textsuperscript{131}

During the period of Bhaskara Ravi, the Jewish leader Joseph Rabban was the major among the traders of Cranganore. When exactly the Jewish merchants came first to settle down in the ports on large numbers cannot be ascertained, though proof for the existence of trade between their kingdom and eastern countries can be traced back to the old testament of Bible.\textsuperscript{132}

A proportion of state revenues in medieval Asia appear to have been derived from the taxes and percentages levied, and the monopolies fixed, on incoming and outgoing foreign goods. This was undoubtedly the reason for the great interest shown by medieval rulers in international maritime trade.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{129} Uma Das Gupta, (ed.), \textit{The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant 1500-1800}, New Delhi, 2001, p.112.
\item \textsuperscript{130} K.N. Ganesh, \textit{Keralathinte Innalekal}, Trivandrum, 1990, p.242.
\item \textsuperscript{132} M.G.S. Narayanan, \textit{Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala, Op.cit.}, p.4.
\end{itemize}
Kodungallur was the hub of the trading activities of the Jews. Certain place names of Kerala reveal the importance of Jews in Kerala society. There is no need of an explanation for the historical importance of the town Mattanchery Jew Street since its name reveals it. There is a pond at Methala in Kodungallur known as “Jutakkalam”.133

Since ancient time Kerala was a centre of cultural transactions. Different religious groups attracted to the land and the natives of Kerala received them without any hesitation. Thus different communities came and settled here and became the part and parcel of Kerala society. The people who followed different religious and cultural patterns, with their conscious or unconscious social behaviour had promoted a synthesis of cultures providing for a common heritage.

People living within a district or geographical contour, but following heterogenous cultural and religious trends, are bound to promote a common culture or heritage pertaining to that particular society. More often, it can be a composite culture, but absolutely leading to a social integrity and unity. Thus medieval Kerala society witnessed a cultural conglomerance and known for its unity in diversity. It was the port cities of Kerala that acted as the arteries for carrying the cultural heritage along with the trading mechanisms.