CHAPTER - VI
CONCLUSION

In the introduction the question was raised as to how far did the urban unit of Cochin influence the maritime trade of India by re-orienting and concentrating the international commerce in Cochin and what role did it, as the first Portuguese settlement in Asia, play in the colonial designs of the Portuguese. The attempt to examine the role which the Portuguese Cochin played in the maritime trade of India as well as in its economic activities is made by highlighting the features of innovation and superiority in relation to other phases. The extent to which this urban unit was utilised by the Lusitanians as a surplus-extracting institutional arrangement as to make a universal empire is analysed by reviewing the plans, strategies and actions of the Portuguese in Cochin.

1. Cochin which emerged as a major centre trade in the Indian Ocean region played very significant role in the maritime commerce of India. The Portuguese who made it their political headquarters till 1530 and later their commercial capital almost till 1611, were chiefly responsible for the convergence of Asian as well as European commerce in Cochin. Cochin with the help of the Portuguese began to control the trade of the Indian Ocean. Commodities that would have been taken by the native merchants to the
traditional ports of Red Sea and Persian Gulf were controlled to a great extent to come to Cochin. The other traditional navigational lines were also modified to a great extent to make the commodities of the Indian-Ocean region to converge in this port. Commodities that were distributed through the East-west axis, i.e. via Malacca, Calicut, Cambay, Aden, Cairo, Alexandria, Venice began to reach Asian as well as European destinations through a new network which developed in Indian Ocean region with Cochin as its core-centre. It eventually took up the position of Calicut and changed the entire commercial balance through Cochin-Lisbon commercial axis. The development of Cochin initiated by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century speaks for the present state of affairs in which Calicut is relegated to the background and Cochin is day by day coming to the fore as a major centre of trade and export.

All the control systems of Cartaz, armada and fortresses were instituted to divert trade to Lisbon through the cape-route. However it is to be said that only one stream of its commerce extended to Lisbon. But the centralization of trade in Cochin realised through this control systems, made this port a great distribution centre of Asian commodities. As a result, Cochin began to exercise a great measure of control even in the Intra-Asian trade. The relatively low rate of customs duties charged by the local ruler from the casados of Cochin gave an added impetus. These casado traders, who entered into partnership with the native merchants and began to divert their own commodities as well as those of their own partners on large scale to Cochin under their name, taking advantage of the concessionary rate granted
to them by the king of Cochin, made Asian trade concentrate in this port unprecedently. The import of large amount of precious metals like gold as well as copper and less frequently silver, as well, from Europe to Cochin made the traders of different parts of India visit Cochin frequently to purchase these metals. These three metals were in high demand all over India for minting coins, silver and copper for making house-hold utensils of the aristocratic families. Gold and silver were also largely used for making ornaments. These metals were brought to Cochin often in exchange for commodities brought from distant and far-flung areas of India.

Moreover, the rich pepper-hinterland which Cochin enjoyed enabled the private traders (both native as well as casados) of Cochin to procure always, through their native links, the necessary merchandise for exchanging with the rice and textiles of Coromandel coast and Bengal ports or with the textiles and indigo of Gujarat ports. Besides this, the rice from Canara ports were taken to Cochin for trading with Maldives, Ceylon and Malacca. Horses were taken fromOrmuz to Cochin for distributing them in southern Kerala and Tamilnadu. Cowries were brought from Maldives to Cochin to be taken to Gujarat and Pegu. Cloves, nutmeg and mace were brought from South East Asia as well as cinnamon from Ceylon by the casados to Cochin and for further distribution all over India.

Cochin’s contact was not limited to the ports and littoral centres of aritime India. Precious stones, diamonds and saltpeter from Madurai were brought to Cochin through the ghat route and taken to different Asian as well
as European destinations. Thus the various commercial streams of India intersected at Cochin where there existed a strong network of distributive trade. In short, the period from 1500 to 1663, when Cochin was ruled by the Portuguese, was something unique in the history of Cochin.

Never before and never afterwards under the other European powers like the Dutch and the English, could this city gain the commercial importance which it had acquired under the Portuguese. Though Cochin was later ruled by the Dutch (1663-1695) and the English (1795-1947), this port could not regain its importance, which it had under the Portuguese. On the contrary it had to keep a low profile in these later periods, because of the fact that the commercial capital of the Dutch was Batavia and that they had other prominent trading centres even in India. Cochin was only one of the several feeding ports for the Dutch. Even during the English period Cochin was reduced to a rather insignificant satellite port, as their prime interest rested with Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. However, during the Portuguese period, though Goa was very important politically, the commercial activities were often dictated by Cochin. Cochin and its vast hinterland often formed one economic unit, which made the economic and the commercial activities of Indian Ocean centre around this port. It could be rightly said that during this period Cochin had emerged as the commercial capital of the maritime India.

2. Cochin was the first port in the history of Asia to establish a direct trade relationship with the Atlantic ports. With the arrival of Cabral, Cochin
began to establish direct trade relationship with Lisbon and the commodities of India and other parts of Asia began to enter Antwerp and northern Europe. As discussed in previous chapters commodities from Quilon, Koyankulam and some of the hinterland areas were brought to this port. Spices like cloves, nutmegs and mace from Southeast Asia, textiles from Bengal, Coromandel and Gujarat were taken to this sea-port for European export. It was chiefly from Cochin that all the commodities were loaded in the ships and sent to Lisbon.

3. The ghat-routes which were already used for low profile trade in the pre-Portuguese period revived and flourished with the price-fixation and the establishment of control systems in Cochin by the Portuguese. Actually the price-fixation by the Portuguese under-priced the commodities and the producers as well as the merchants began to look to the ghat-route as a profitable outlet. Added to this, cartaz system and frequent confiscation of the commodities in the absence of this Portuguese pass, made the natives co-operate with the traditional ghat-routes, which were linked with the hinterland of Cochin. The tensions in the hinterland, especially between the St. Thomas Christians and the Portuguese, accelerated the flow of spices through this route to the ports of Coromandel, after the middle of the sixteenth century. Kumily, Munnar, Peringalkuthu were the important mountain-outlets through which spices were diverted from the hinterland of Cochin to Dindigal and Madura, from where they were taken to the ports of Coromandel. It must be specially remembered that these ghat-routes were more active than Aryankavu and Palghat passes, as far as the diversion of the
spices from the hinterland of Cochin to the Tamil ports were concerned, as the latter passes were situated very far away from the production centres of Cochin. With the tightening of Portuguese control systems, trade through these ghat-routes increased unprecedently. Consequently, as we have already seen in chapters four and five, the European export trade of pepper from Cochin, which formed forty per cent of the total production in the second decade of the sixteenth century, fell to 3.1 per cent of total production by the first decade of the seventeenth century. Even though, there was a great increase in the production of pepper, almost 15.5 per cent of the total produce went through the ghat-routes by the beginning of the seventeenth century, which was five times greater than the European export-trade.

4. The amount of extraction, which Cochin as pre-colonial city did, was rather very less, as one single commodity, i.e. pepper, formed the 70 to 95 per cent of the total cargo taken to Portugal. By the end of the sixteenth century, pepper became the greatest single commodity that was exported to Europe. Though in the beginning of the sixteenth century about 40 per cent of the total production was taken to Lisbon it fell to 3.5 to 10 per cent by the beginning of the seventeenth century. The remaining 90 per cent was either distributed within Asia for consumption or taken to the ports of Red sea and Persian gulf for further distribution to Europe via the Levant and Venice. This small figure in the trade of pepper, which is significantly little in relation to the total production, gives us the impression that it did not seem to have taken to the dimensions of extracting commerce. The majority of the other commodities which filled the space of Lisbon-bound vessels was
also spices and agricultural products. The products of the secondary sector like textiles from Bengal, Coromandel coast and Gujarat entered the cargo-list and often formed 5 to 10 per cent of the total cargo. But they were not coming under commodities reserved to the crown and so the profit from the trade in these items went to private individuals often settled in India. In general, taking the commodities together, one cannot see the elements of extraction. But the tendency to grab more surplus was exhibited in the attempts for price-fixation for pepper and other commodities at a rate, which was lower than that of Pre-Portuguese times. It was actually an under-pricing of the commodities and the elements of extraction of the surplus became increasingly evident from the fact that the Lusitanians did not allow a change in the price of pepper for more than 130 years, inspite of the value fluctuations of the currency and the increase of cost of living and inflation. However, this impeded the Portuguese commerce as well, and they had to pay the price for it. The cultivators and merchants, over whom the Portuguese had no control, were in no way bound to sell the commodities at this low price to the Lusitanians and naturally they preferred to sell the commodities to the traders associated with ghat-route, who paid high prices.

5. A look at the value of export trade from Cochin would shed further light on this issue. The pepper money imported to India could not be taken as the barometer to assess the value of export-trade, as this money was often diverted to several purposes other than the purchase of spices. Though the crown officially used to ban the diversion of this fund, the practice
continued through out the period. The worth of the export trade from Cochin could easily be found by multiplying the quantity of cargo taken to Europe, with the price that prevailed in Cochin (where the fixed rate was 2.66 cruzados per quintal) as well as in Lisbon (where the minimum rate was 22 cruzados per quintal). The annual average export of pepper was estimated to be around 12400 quintals. This evidently shows that the value of pepper (which formed the major commodity of European export) taken to Lisbon was around 32,984 cruzados. However, besides the fixed price the Portuguese used to pay much as "protection cost" for the pepper trade. Thus we have to add to this figure the amount paid as annuities to the rulers of the hinterland, the cost of patrolling in the lagoons, at the junctional points of the rivers as well as along the western sea coast. The Portuguese practice of buying spices at a fixed price, which was lower than the Pre-Portuguese period made an increase in the "protection cost" inevitable, as the spices were often diverted to places where they were better-priced. Besides this, one should add the shipping cost to the total expenditure. These various heads of expenses added the value of pepper when it reached Lisbon. In Lisbon a quintal of pepper was sold at the minimum rate of 22 cruzados. Thus the value of the 12,400 quintals (which was estimated to be the annual average export from Malabar to Europe) was 2,72,800 cruzados in Lisbon. It shows that there was a difference of 2,39,816 cruzados every year, which the Portuguese took as profit and as money to meet the expenses incurred in the trade between Cochin and Lisbon. Though we do not have details to assess the exact profit, it seems that the balance sheet was very much favourable to the
Portuguese. Besides pepper several other commodities like ginger, cinnamon, cloves, nutmegs, diamonds and precious metals, which were-valued high in Europe, were taken from Cochin to Lisbon. But pepper which formed bulk commodity was taken as an example to assess the value of export trade.

6. Since the hinterland was outside the control of the Portuguese, the possibilities for extraction was still less. The economic decisions taken by the cultivators could, in no way, be influenced simply by the commercial policies of the Portuguese. The hinterland was integrated with the city of Cochin only in so far as the former got some advantages and got their interests protected. When there was some clash in of interests between the Portuguese and the various factors of the hinterland, as in the case of the war of Vadakkenkur king or the rebellion of the St. Thomas Christians, the hinterland put forward its interests in the fore-front and was ready even to turn against the Portuguese. The same was true of the king of Cochin. He supported the Portuguese only in as much as the latter helped him to protect his interests. When the Portuguese were against his plans and moves, the local kings used to assert themselves and clashes ensued frequently. As Cochin was never a territory conquered by the Portuguese, but a free gift given by the local ruler of Cochin, the dependency of the Lusintanians on the king of Cochin was always there. It was the same feeling which made the Portuguese to confer several concessions and favours on the local ruler. The king of Cochin too had a great sense of indebtedness to the Portuguese. They liberated him from the clutches of vassalage to the Zamorin
and made an independent king by performing the coronation ceremony officially in 1505. However, it must be said that the hinterland and the local ruler of Cochin often acted as spontaneous machineries of check and control to the extracting tendencies of the Portuguese.

7. Though in all other Portuguese settlements, customs duty was used as a means for taking the surplus from the traders, Cochin had a different practice. As the port belonged to the local ruler, the Portuguese had to concede to him the right to collect customs duties. The king developed the strategy of collecting more money by reducing the rate for casados, which made commodities flow to Cochin from different directions under the name of casados, often belonging to them; at times belonging to native merchants but cleared the customs as merchandise belonging to casado. This practice reduced the Portuguese revenue from the customs. Although the period of our study, as mentioned in previous chapters, the income of the local ruler from the customs of Cochin stood far greater than that of the Portuguese. It shows that customs was also a weak instrument in the hand of the Portuguese of Cochin and the possibilities of extraction was relatively less.

8. However, there was an indirect way of extraction in which the native vessels were allowed less frequently to conduct the commerce. Actually it emerged as a part of the Portuguese strategy to exercise control over the movements of ships, especially over merchant vessels. All the native vessels had to travel either with pass or with the risk of being captured. It did greater harm to the trade of the local people than the direct way of extraction. The native traders who were less organised (except the so-called
corsairs), before the military-based arrangement of the Portuguese had minimum options. The traditional native merchant groups were hit hard by this and they became relatively insignificant in the field of commerce by the second half of the sixteenth century. Most of the prominent Muslim merchants of Cochin were either pushed to the corsair activities or to the low-profile trade of the peddlers. In this gap came up the private Portuguese traders and the position of the traditional merchants was taken up by the *casado* traders of Cochin.

9. However, the *casados* had more a pro-Asian policy as far as their commerce was concerned. They took pepper from Cochin to Bengal or Coromandel and exchanged it with textiles which they further exchanged in Southeast Asia for nutmegs, cloves and mace etc., or pepper to China in exchange for porceline and silk and this exchange trade generated much more profit than the export trade to Europe. The various voyages and licences conceded to individuals increased the volume of this exchange trade. During the Portuguese period, often the profit from this exchange trade went into the hands of either *casados* who were settled in Cochin or of their native partners and this was further utilised as capital for further commercial enterprises. In contrast to the exchange trades, conducted under the Dutch or the British, where the profit of these exchange trade was taken by the company and taken to Europe, there developed almost unknowingly an Asia-centered or India-centered trade policy among the *casados*, which made the drainage of wealth relatively less.
10. Precious metals like gold, silver and copper which were very rare in India, were imported to India from Europe in large volumes as pepper money. Though they were imported by the Portuguese to generate further profit either by sale in the open market or by investment in pepper, India got abundant supply of these metals, which were in high demand for the minting of coins of the various native kingdoms. Most of the gold and silver was used for minting coins. A large volume of copper and some silver was also used for making ornaments, house-hold utensils of the aristocratic families. The flow of bullions to India, even if it was to generate further profit for the Portuguese, increased the wealth of the native kingdoms and chieftains and to monetise the economy.

11. The features of pre-colonial cities began to appear some in evident form and others in embryonic shape in Cochin by this period. The city of Portuguese Cochin began to be dominated chiefly by the Europeans and later by the mixed race; but the predominant religion was Christianity. The presence of European women was very less which led to the practice of the Portuguese marrying native women. The Portuguese city of Cochin maintained its identity by deliberately keeping it as a seperate urban unit, comprising chiefly of Europeans and people of mixed race. Several characteristic features of a pre-colonial city could be traced in this part of Cochin. Several elements of European culture penetrated into Kerala through this urban unit.
12. There developed in and around Cochin new centers of economic importance and commercial significance. It began with the Portuguese policy to transplant the European concept of balance of power in Malabar instead of the traditional norms existing in the region. They often supported the weak rulers and made alliances with them to compete or to fight against the powerful kings. Cochin was, thus befriended to fight against Calicut. Later the kings of Vadakkenkur, Thekkenkur, Tanu and Porcad were supported with a view to serving their political designs. The end result of these political manoeuvourings was that these places became places of political importance but also of economic significance. They became commercially important, as well.

13. The export of pepper from Cochin to Europe, was only a stream of commerce parallel to the private trade from Cochin as well as ghat-route trade from the hinterland of Cochin. These three streams of commerce increased the demand for pepper which, in turn, intensified the pepper cultivation. More areas were brought under cultivation, making the agricultural tendencies of Kerala oriented towards commercial crops.

14. These three streams of commerce operating parallely and simultaneously meant rather better economic conditions for the merchants and large scale cultivators, who could dictate the price of the commodities. This improved their life-style. The bungalow model of architecture introduced by the Portuguese was imitated and taken to interior regions by the wealthy and well off. The sophisticated European way of life entered Cochin and the regions nearby.
15. The trade in nutmeg, cloves and mace with South East Asia as well as in cinnamon with Ceylon led to the introduction of these plants in Kerala, especially in regions near Cochin which led to an agrarian as well as economic revolution in the later phase of its history. Tapioca, which was the common man’s bread in Kerala till 1980’s, pine-apple, the main commercial crop of the present day Muvattupuzha, Vazhakulam and Kottayam regions, cashew nut, the chief commercial crop of Malabar regions, Quilon, Central Kerala entered through Portuguese contacts with Cochin. Though these items did not play important role in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they do play major role in the present day economy of Kerala.

In general, Cochin, as far as its economic and commercial activities were concerned, went out of its city wall and controlled the trade of Europe and Asia for more than a century. The conditions of Europe and India influenced, to a great extent, the ups and downs of Cochin’s commercial activities, in various phases. However, Cochin, where the Portuguese, the first of the various European groups to come to Asia and India, established their first trade-oriented colony and urban centre, offers a rare, if not unique, development in history where the Asian trade was concentrated for promoting European trade of exports and imports.
SOURCE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. The Maps of Malabar and the Hinterland of Cochin: 1500-1663 are designed by H. Nischk, the cartographer of the Department of Geography, Südasie Institut of Hidelberg University, Germany on the basis of the details furnished by the author.

2. The Plan 1 (pp. 122-123) is entitled as Defeza de Cochim/Que fez Duarte Pa/checo em 1504. It is taken from Boletim do Instituto Vasco da Gama, No.36, 1937, a seguir á pag.118.

3. The Plan 2 (pp. 126-127) is from Luiz da Silveira, Livro das Plantas Fortalezas, Cidades e Povoações do Estado da India Oriental, com as Descrições do Maritimo dos Reinos e Provinciais onde estão Situados e outros Portos Principais daqueles partes, Contribuição para a Historia das Fortalezas dos Portugueses no Ultramar, Reproduction of the Codice, 1471, existing in the Biblioteca do Paço Ducal de vila Viçosa, Lisboa, 1991, no.72, p.88.


6. The Plan 5 (pp.155-156) is from Faria E Sousa, Asia Portuguesa, 1666, Tom.I,p.59

7. Cochin on the eve of 1663 is taken from NAAUWKEURIGE BESCHRYVINGE VAN MALABAR EN CHROMANDEL, Der Zelver aangrenzende RYKEN, En het machtige EYLAND CEYLON Door PHILIPPUSS BALDAEUS, t' Amsterdam, by Johannes Janssonius van Waasberge, Johannes van Someren. Ano 1572.

8. The Graphs and Diagrams are drawn on the basis of the data supplied in the text, for which references are given in the foote-notes of respective chapters.