

**URBANISATION IN KERALA  
c. 1900-1981**

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BY

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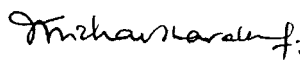
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I hereby affirm that the research for this dissertation titled "Urbanisation in Kerala, c.1900-1981" being submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy was carried out entirely by me at the Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum.

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Certified that this dissertation is the bonafide work of Sri T.T. Sreekumar and has not been considered for the award of any other degree by any other University. The dissertation may be forwarded for evaluation.

  
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## PREFACE

In this work I am confronting the question of social space or rather the relationship between society and space in Kerala roughly over a period of hundred years. In the gestation and preparation of this work I have received more intellectual and technical assistance than I can ever adequately acknowledge. It is not merely as a part of void accademic convention that I am here trying to record my feelings.

To begin with, I owe much to the conversations with and forbearance of my supervisors Michael Tharakan and Mohanan Pillai. Their suggestions and criticisms had always made me strive for more rigorous formulations. I should also like to acknowledge the help of a number of other scholars who read the drafts in whole or in part, or with whom I have discussed several aspects of this study at various stages. In particular I should thank Dr.K. Nagraj, Rex Cassinader, Srikumar Chathopadhyay, Dr.K.P.Kannan and Dr.G.N. Rao. All our views were never in conconrence, obviously so. But their posers helped me to avoid many flaws and to certain extend re-structure the whole theses. I am also deeply indebted to many other friends with whom I have discussed various aspects of the subject matter or related topics. I hope they will forgive me for not singling them out individually. Errors and ommissions may still remain, entirely due to my own limitations as a researcher.

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 19th century less than three percent of the world population lived in urban areas. Towards the end of the 20th century what we experience is an urban revolution by which half of the world population have become urban dwellers. Prior to the second world war the process of urban growth was accentuated by highly industrialised regions. Today, the major role in the global dynamics of urban growth is played by less opulent countries to which the equivocal term "third world" is commonly applied. The practical and political significance of this new phenomenon is reflected in the increasing attention accorded in field of comparative urban research. But a cursory glance at the ever accumulating literature on third world urban process would also reveal a growing disillusionment among researchers with some of the popular theoretical models that try to explain the complexities couched in the spatial dynamics of these regions. It is surprising that although the empirically oriented studies continue to expand at a considerable pace, most of the conceptual issues still remain unresolved. Therefore, we would begin with a critical review of some of the suggested explanatory frameworks and their ideological implications when juxtaposed with the realities of the third world urban process.

The major approaches towards the interpretation of the spatial categories and social processes in the third world can be

broadly classified into two: (i) the modernisation theory (ii) the dependency theory. The logical pillar of the modernisation theory is a traditional - modern duality thesis where underdevelopment is conceptualised as the original state of affairs manifested by traditionalism and backwardness while development is envisaged in terms of the withering away of these features. In a Rostovian sense (Rostov, 1960) development appears to be a path already traced that societies are supposed to follow if they manifest a spirit of enterprise (Castells, 1977:40). An agricultural subsistence economy is envisaged as the starting point from where an intra-regional specialisation of primary activities and inter regional trade developed. This was accompanied by the development of transport facilities. All these in their turn led to the growth of industrial activities. Centres which formed the nuclei of these transformations could absorb the surplus labour (1) in the traditional subsistence economy resulting in large scale migration and population concentration. There was also a high level of specialisation and diversification of manufacturing which led to the emergence of huge industrial complexes as well as a well developed tertiary sector that provided high quality services (Knaap, 1980). These processes finally culminated in the diffusion of the fruits of change from the industrial urban centres to the rural countryside resulting in a rural-urban continuum (2). In other words the rural-urban differences developed in a unilinear fashion which led to a break down of rural urban differences. Thus one can delineate three inter-related aspects of urbanisation. One is the sequential sectoral development of the economy. Second is the growing concentration of population in areas where secondary

and tertiary activities are located. Third is the diffusion of the development process leading to the disappearance of rural urban differences. This assumed relationship between urbanisation and economic development has been "proved" by several scholars using highly sophisticated mathematical techniques (3).

The modernisation theorists would argue that the industrial urban development in the west and the urban process in the third world today is the same barring the fact that they are greatly separated in time and space (4). Implicit in this sweeping assumption is (i) the making of a theoretical model based on the urban experience of the west would suit the analytical requirements of the urban problem in the third world and (ii) a change from the traditional to modern could occur in the third world through the diffusion of capital, technology, values, institutional arrangements and political beliefs from the west. The origin of this approach goes back to the post second world war period which saw an unprecedented spurt in the literature on economic development.

Modernisation theory continued to be the dominant stream in comparative urban research in the 1960's and now there is a general recognition that the historical process of urbanisation in the third world is distinctly different from that of industrialised countries. Further, the class structure and ecology of the third world cities also differ from that of their counter parts in the west (Safa, 1982:3). If urbanisation in the third world is only a replica of the European experience in the 18th and 19th centuries, then naturally in the less developed countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, where we find an

urban explosion must be a result of industrial expansion. But, it is well known that most of these countries have a very weak industrial base and a direct shift from agriculture to the tertiary sector is the hallmark of the change in the occupational structure of these areas. Unable to resolve this apparent "contradiction" of theory and reality, the modernisation theorists conveniently assess the third world situation as one of 'over' urbanisation or 'hyper' urbanisation. The draw back of such an approach are too obvious. We shall point out three major objections following Slater (1986:10). First, the western universalism rooted in the modernisation paradigm can not possibly capture the historical specificities of social change in the third world. Second, the non materialist perspective of this approach fails to provide an interpretative framework for examining spatial expansion of capitalism and its impact in the third world. Third, the approach does not provide a realistic tool to understand the city countryside relations and processes such as the transformation of the territorial division and socialisation of labour. Chinchilla (1986:146-8) argues that the most fundamental problem with the modernisation paradigm is that its conception of change is overly linear, teleological and ahistorical. It equates the process of change with movement between two fixed points. This approach basically reflects the conservative intellectual tradition in urban research (Chilcote, 1981:10).

Urban studies under went a paradigm shift of drastic proportions in response to the theoretical shifts in development theory as such since the 1960's, especially with the emergence of what is collectively referred to as the dependency theory

(Hinderson, 1986:63). In the dependency approach we find an exact inversion of the fundamental assumption of modernisation theory regarding the nature of relations between industrialised countries and the third world. Dependency theory gives emphasis to the fact that the underdevelopment of the third world is in fact the negative effect of the external dominance. Thus the principal insight this theory provided is that the specific historically determined character of the social formations in the third world cannot be analysed properly without placing the question of imperialist domination at the centre of the problematic (Quijano, 1983: 107). The classic reference to this approach is Frank (1967).

The dependency theory was linked to the analysis of the urban question initially by Castells (1977). He argued that the process of urbanisation is the expression of the social dynamic of the penetration of the capitalist mode of production historically formed in Europe, into the remainder of the world. He identified three types of domination (i) colonial domination with direct administration of an intensive exploitation of resources and affirmation of political sovereignty; (ii) capitalist commercial domination through unequal terms of exchange; (iii) imperialist industrial and financial domination. In this set up, the towns that emerged specialised in administrative and commercial functions. On the basis of this schematisation, Castells pointed out that dependent urbanisation results in a super concentration of population in urban areas, i.e. the development of primate cities(5). His analysis was primarily based on Latin American experience. Following Castells

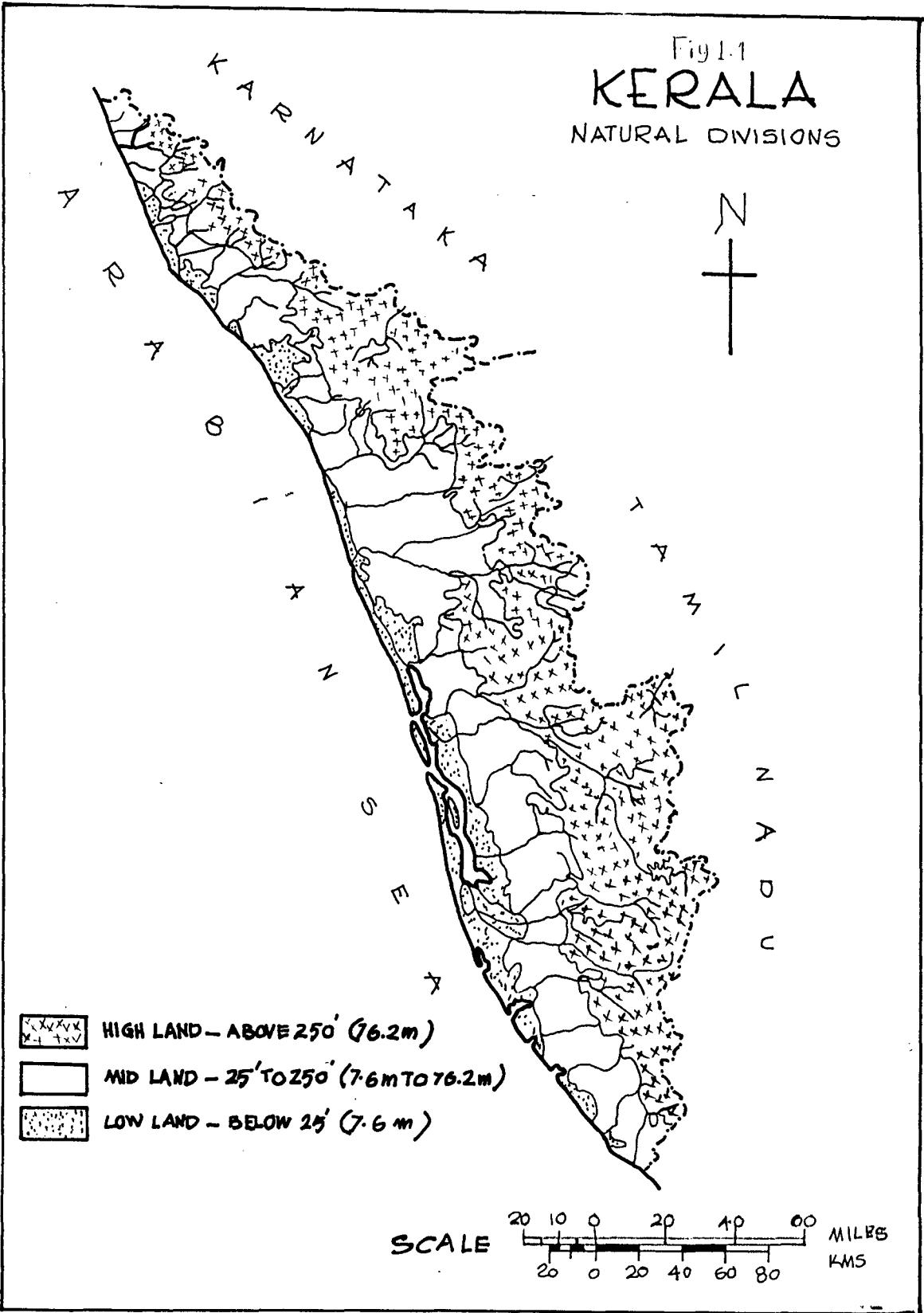
Safa (1982) tried to locate the urban question in the third world within the dependency framework. It was identified that the different patterns of urbanisation in the less developed countries originate from their late entry into the global capitalist system and dependence on advanced countries for capital, export market and technology. Roberts (1978) also enquired into the implications of core-periphery interaction for the patterns of urbanisation. Generally urbanisation has been treated as one specific feature within the overall formulations of dependency theory and the problems, conventionally associated with urbanisation such as economic development were viewed as only resolvable through the breaking of dependency relations and actuation of a process of revolutionary transformation (Slator, 1986:2). But one is cautioned against any sweeping generalisation for the whole third world based on the dependency theory. Although the dependency approach in terms of analytical rigour enjoys tremendous superiority over the modernisation approach, any formulation which neglects the ecological and other historical differences that exist among the third world countries influencing the production of spatial forms would lead to partial and reductive conclusions. One way out of this methodological imprecision would be to understand the actual processes which generate specific spatial forms at several analytical levels.

In this study we have taken the case of spatial transformation in Kerala State as our particular object of analysis. Some recent macro level disaggregated studies which analyse the emerging urban pattern in India, leaves out Kerala as a special case (6). According to them, Kerala poses certain problems in the definition of an urban unit itself with its high

rural density (556 per sq.km) and big villages with a population more than 5,000. Every form of matter has history, or rather it is its history. So an understanding of origin and causes of this unique spatial formation does constitute an object of study. Thus the problematic of the present enquiry revolves round two major issues (i) In what all respects are the temporal changes in the spatial structure of Kerala different from other third world regions? (ii) What are the major determinants of the production of spatial forms in Kerala?

The state of Kerala came into existence as a result of the States Re-organisation Act, 1956. United Kerala comprised of the greater part of the old state of Travancore and Cochin, Malabar district and kasargod taluk of south canara district in Madras Presidency. It is a narrow stretch of land (which lies in south west India) bounded by Arabian sea on the west, and western ghats in the east. The whole state is between 8° 18' and 12° 48 north latitudes and 74 52' and 77 24' east longitudes, with an area of about 39,000 sq.km. The length of the coast line is 580 km and the breadth varies from a minimum of 11 km to a maximum of 121 km. The territory is divided into three major natural divisions: (see figure 1.1) the high land, the low land and the mid land. The high land is a mountainous terrain thickly forested in the upper range and interspersed with plantations crops in the lower range. The mid land is characterised by undulating terrain with hills and valleys. A variety of crops such as paddy, tapioca, species, sugar cane plantain etc. are cultivated in this region. The low land is a sandy strip of land with numerous backwaters. Paddy and coconut are the major crops here. These basic physiographic zones cover 10 per cent (low land) 42 per cent (mid

Fig 1.1  
**KERALA**  
NATURAL DIVISIONS





land) and 48 per cent (high land) of the total geographical area. The distribution of population over these regions is 26 per cent 59 per cent and 15 per cent respectively. The low land has the highest population density (1,385 per sq.km) followed by mid land (778 per sq.km) and high land stands third (172 per sq.km). With respect to over all population density kerala ranked first with 662 per sq.km. according to 1981 census. The settlement pattern in Kerala itself is rather unique. Kerala does not possess a village system unlike other parts of the sub continent. Historically, there developed a dispersed settlement pattern without a common node(7). The tracts are densely populated that it becomes difficult to delineate one village from another. In other words the whole region looks like a garden city. This has resulted in the phenomenon of big villages with arbitrary boundaries. In fact they are revenue villages the boundaries of which were demarcated by colonial authorities according to their convenience. To be precise, one can say that the rural-urban distinction is rather difficult in Kerala.

Kerala was integrated into the world system of capitalism in the 18th century itself. But the influx of British capital to a considerable extend began in the 19th century. British capital was mainly invested in the plantations in the ghat region. During the post first world war period almost all the cash crops produced in Kerala had a growing demand from outside and the economy gradually became an export depended one. These political economy factors as well as the ecological set up had tremendous impact in the process of spatial evolution in Kerala. The proposed study would thus set out the following aspects as its main objectives.

(i) to provide a brief overview of the genesis of urban forms in Kerala (ii) to understand the patterns and processes of urbanisation in Kerala in the modern period. (iii) to probe into the salient features of the modern urban system as it emerges in Kerala and (iv) to explain in detail the causative factors or rather the major determinants of spatial evolution in Kerala.

The analytical requirements of the proposed study suggest that an inter-disciplinary approach would be necessary. Basically we would pursue a historical mode of enquiry. We may use some simple statistical techniques to understand the quantitative dimensions of certain key issues. The kind of enquiry obviously demands a heavy dependence on secondary materials on history and economy of Kerala. Apart from this the major source of information is the decennial censuses. It may be noted that the comparison of the data presented in the different censuses is highly problematic. This is due to the changes in the definition of an urban unit from census to census. Unfortunately we cannot make any corrections to these data. Conventionally an urban area is defined in terms of three variables, number, density of settlement and degree of heterogeneity of the urban population (Wirth, 1959). The statistical empiricism in the delimitation of the concept of urban is too obvious. The thresholds used for the delimitation of an urban unit vary from place to place and this makes international comparisons difficult. The 1981 census defined an urban area as follows.

- (a) All places with a Municipality, Corporation or Cantonment Board or notified town area;

(b) All other places which satisfied the following criteria:

- (i) A minimum population of 5000
- (ii) A population of 400 persons per km<sup>2</sup> and
- (iii) At least 75 per cent of the male working population pursuing non-primary activities.

The structure of the study is as follows Chapter II

critically examines the common notions about the ancient spurts of urbanism in Kerala in different time brackets and try to locate the exact genesis urban settlements. It is an attempt to find out the breaks and continuities in Kerala's urban history Chapter III would look into the urban question, since the beginning of the 20th century. The dynamics of the spatial temporal shifts in the configuration of population is analysed and its differences from other parts of India is specified. Chapter IV is complimentary to this discussion where we would try to examine the characteristics of Kerala's modern urban system. In chapter V, we would probe into the details of Kerala's differential urban performance and suggest explanations. Chapter VI would give a summary of main findings.

## Notes

1. For a discussion on surplus labour see Arthur Lewis (1954, 1958), M.P. Todaro (1969) etc.
2. An excellent review of the rural-urban continuum debate is provided in Mcgee (1971).
3. See Losch (1954)
4. For example see Reisman (1964)
5. See Rakesh Mohan and Panth (1982)
6. There will be a heavy concentration of population and urban economic activities in these cities leading to imbalances in the spatial system of the country concerned. Many of the third world countries are characterised by the pre-eminence of such a dominant node.
7. Origins and causes of settlements types in Kerala are discussed in George Kurien, (1939) V.K.J. Menon (1953) etc.

## Chapter II

### GENESIS OF URBAN SETTLEMENTS : AN OVERVIEW

#### 2.0. Introduction

The study of the historical processes which generated urban forms in Kerala is the object of our present enquiry. As far as the ancient period (c.300 B.C to 600 A.D) and the medieval period (600 A.D to 1500 A.D) are concerned any attempt at schematic exposition of the relationship between social processes and spatial forms poses several problems. This is mainly due to a dearth of evidence to codify and conceptualise early urban evolution. The available evidences are a few Roman and Greek coins found in different parts of present day Kerala (which belongs to the periods of Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius and Claudius), Tamil literary texts of the sangam Age<sup>1</sup>, some inscription, the travelogues of foreign visitors during that period, and some archeological evidences. Traditional historians<sup>2</sup>, on the basis of these signifiers have tried at length to describe the genesis and growth of urban centers in early Kerala. But the study of early urban forms becomes highly problematic given the looseness of these signifiers in terms of interpretation. It emerges that at the outset one has to come to terms with the poser of how urban forms could have emanated in ancient Kerala. One has to elucidate the specific meaning of these signifiers and criticize the commonsense notions which encumber the process of codifying, conceptualising and

formulating a historical construct. An understanding of the relationship between society and its spatial imprint would ipsofacto reveal to us how some misconceptions were parachuted into the question of early spatial formation. A close and careful rereading of the available evidences<sup>3</sup> suggests that traditional historians to a certain extent had misinterpreted these signifiers.

The working frame work within which the histories of different regions in India are located is found to be of no use in our case. The frame work postulated is commonly used to speculate a chronological span compressing the complex processes of the histories of different regions into an all-India spectrum and to examine them on the basis of whether one particular phase is observable in a particular region or not as if the regions did not have definite individual existence. Our approach is just the opposite, we focus on history at a regional level and try to identify the internal and external factors which could have generated urban forms in different time brackets. Adequate allowance is also made to the fact that any time brackets such as ancient, medieval, modern etc. serves only as sensitizing devices by which the different phases of urban evolution could be distinguished and over all patterns discerned. Beyond that these chronological limits become irrelevant and the task is to **construct real histories based on concrete regional evidences.**

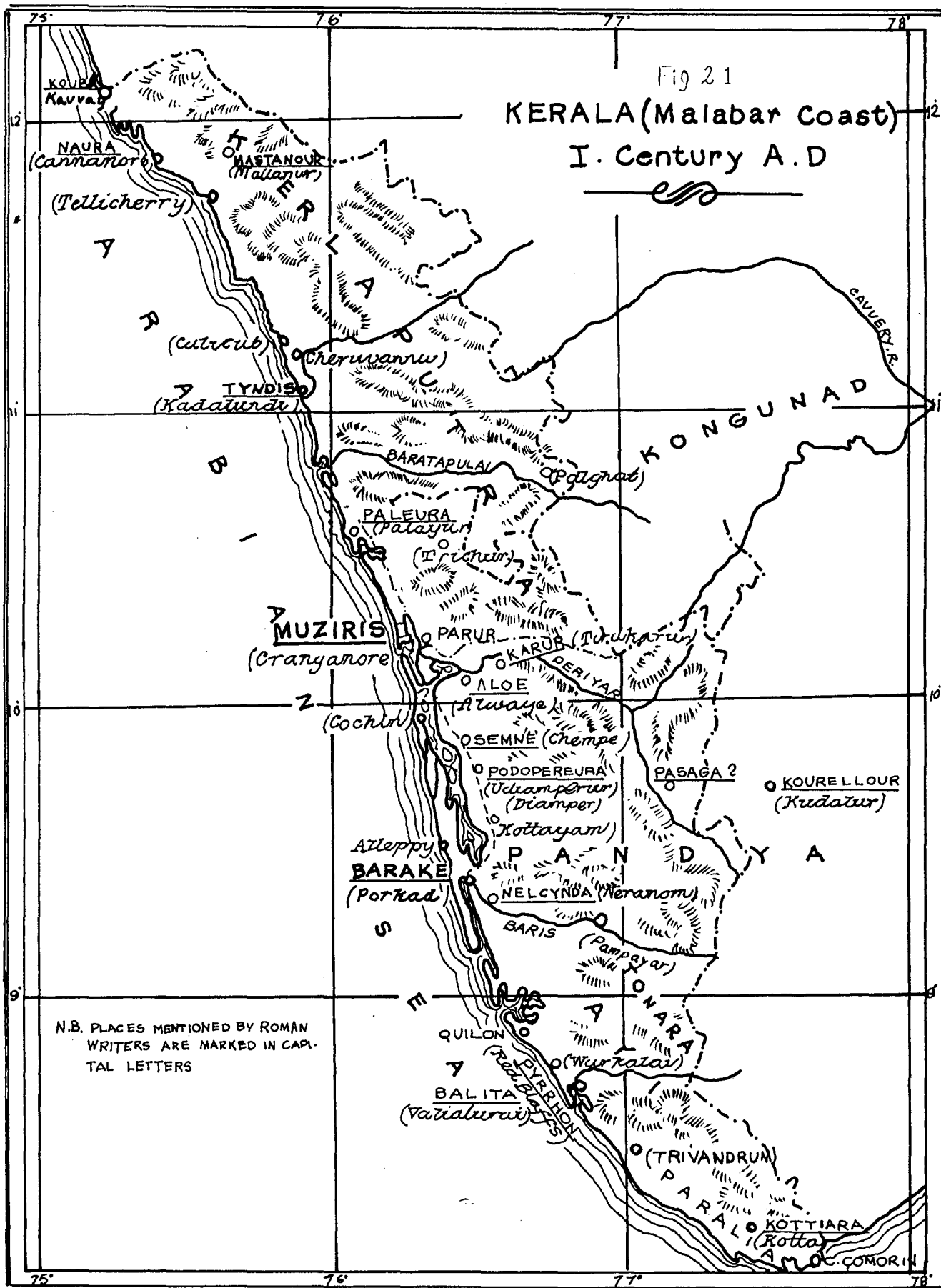
This chapter is essentially an attempt to criticise the distorted representation of Kerala's early urban history on the one hand and to provide an interpretative framework within which the process of modern urbanisation could be conceptualised.

## 2.1 Early Urban Settlements

The earliest concentrated settlements with urban characteristics might have emerged either as a result of inter-thinai<sup>2</sup> exchanges or external trade. Between 300 BC and 300 AD, Malabar was the premier entrepot of Roman trade in the east (Thomas, 1932:230). Roman and Greek connections and inter thinai relations produced certain trade enclaves along the coastal line and in the mid land. Pliny's "Natural History" and "Periplus Maris Aerithrae" by an anonymous author gives a fairly detailed account of the different trade centres in Malabar between 300 BC and 300 AD. Ptolemy's "Geography" (150 A.D) is another source of information. Muziris is perhaps the most important ancient port mentioned by these authors. To the north of Muziris, according to Ptolemy, were Naura and Tyndis. Some inland towns such as Noroulla, Kouba and Paloura are also mentioned. To the south of Muziris the major urban trade centres were Barake and Nelcynda. Passage, Mastanour, Kourellour Pounnata, Aloe, Karoura, Arembour, Bidiris, Patipolis, Adarima and Koeour are some of the inland towns identified by Ptolemy between the rivers Periyar and Baris.

Location of these towns on the basis of Stadia measurement<sup>3</sup> and identification of these names with some close sounding place names of present day Kerala, for examples Bareka and Porakadu, Aloe as Always etc. are rather unwarranted. Figure 2.1 is a **glaring** example of such a mistake. The **basic** assumption (which is infact invalid on geographical grounds) behind this vague speculation is that the coastal line in Kerala has continued unaltered through out history.

The next question is how far one can designate urban





was invited to settle down there (M.G.S. Narayan, 1972). Fragmentary evidences would suggest that this emerged as a chinese colony. Towards the end of the midieval period Calicut emerged as a major trading Centre. The position of Calicut at the time of the arrival of the portuguese was that of a flourishing port. Abdur-Rezzak noted in 1443 that Calicut was a flourishing port where merchants from every city and every country came together. He had also noted the abundance of precious articles which where brought from other parts of the world<sup>2</sup>. Considered Quilon as one of the finest cities in Malabar with magnificent markets and very wealthy merchants. Descriptions of these travallers suggests beyond doubt that trade carried out in these<sup>3</sup> centres were not mainly by the natives but by foreign merchants. Merchants from elsewhere were simply making use of the natural harbouring facilities in these places.

## 2.2 Kerala and the World System

The political and social conditions of Malbar at the end of the 15th century immediately before the arrival of the portuguese in 1498 presents some striking features<sup>10</sup>. There was nothing in the nature of royal power and the whole land was divided into a number of petty principalities. Technological backwardness which was a characteristic feature of Malabar agriculture continued unimpaired even during this period<sup>11</sup>. With the rise of the ~~Portuguese~~ there was a diversion of trade from Calicut to Cochin and Goa which weakened the hold of the Zamorins. Portuguese factories were built at Cochin, Quilon and Cannanore. They also built fortresses at Thankasserri, Cranganore and Beypore. Following the portuguese the Dutch also built up a

lucrative commerce along the Kerala Coast. Ashin Das Gupta (1967) gives a fairly good account of the nature of dutch trade along the Malabar coast( see also Schenk, 1986). But a real turning-point in the urban history of the region is the arrival of the British East India company. British by degrees got possession of all Dutch factories and emerged as the undisputed masters of the Malabar trade. The most conveniently placed villages began to grow into towns because they were administrative centres from which the district officers of the company and later the British government could tour and supervise the country side<sup>12</sup>. Small towns also sprang up around contonments and as trade developed leading to functional specialisation and links between villages, urbanism began to get imbricated into different parts of the region. It must be noted that till the second half of the 19th century there was hardly any systematic increase in the number of towns or increase in the size of already existed trading centres. The Table 2.1 shows the percentage of urban population to total population in Kerala and average size of a town in 1881, 1891 and 1901.

Table 2.1

Index of Urbanisation 1881-1901.

Year	Urban Population (%)	Average size of a town
1881	6.6	16882
1891	6.1	18143
1901	7.5	21274

Source : Census of India 1901.

It can be seen that though the percentage of urban population showed a decline in 1891, the average size of a town increased

consistently overtime. But the interregional differences in the level of urbanisation is worth discussing. The three regions in Kerala, Travancore, Cochin and Malabar performed differently during the period. Table 2.2 reveals that Travancore had lagged behind the other two regions in terms of the degree of urbanisation through out the four decades.

Table 2.2: Level of urbanisation 1881-1911

Year	Travancore	Cochin	Malabar
1881	4.4	10.6	7.7
1891	3.6	10.2	7.4
1901	6.2	10.8	7.8

Source: Census of India, 1901

Expansion of cultivation, development of transport facilities, population growth etc. are some of the factors which actuated the process of urbanisation in Kerala in the latter half of the 19th century. Till the beginning of the 19th century, attention was concentrated on the cultivation of staple food items like paddy, tapioca, coconut etc. Ryots grew pepper on limited scale and hill tribes collected wild cardamoms only as plantation products. The investment of British capital and efforts of christian missionaries, initiated the process of commercialised agriculture. Waste lands were cleared and in swampy areas reclamation schemes were worked out. Food crops like paddy, tapioca coconut etc. became commercial products in addition to plantation crops like pepper, coffee, tea, rubber, cardamom etc. Volume of trade also increased considerably<sup>13</sup>. Another major development was the spectacular increase in population in the second half of the 19th century. This also might have contributed to the expansion of cultivation. Table

2.3 gives the data regarding cultivated area and population in Malabar and Travancore. It can be seen that the rate of

Table 2.3

Population growth and expansion of cultivation.

Year	Cultivated area in	Total population	Average per annum increase in cultivation area	Geometric rate of growth of population
(i) Malabar				
1826	581,120	927,705	-	-
1881	1,146,544	2,365,035	1.76% ) 1.45	1.63% ) 1.15%
1911	1,296,462	3,015,119	0.43% )	0.81% )
(ii) Travancore				
1820	702,560	906,587	-	-
1881	-	2,401,158	- ) 1.95%	1.11% ) 1.14%
1911	1,942,803	3,428,975	- )	1.20% )

Source: T.C. Varghese (1972)

expansion of cultivation was higher in Travancore than in Malabar. T.C. Varghese (1972) attributes this to the differences in tenurial patterns that existed in these two regions. The increase in the volume of trade and increase in population led to a rapid development of transport facilities in Kerala in the latter half of the 19th century<sup>14</sup>. The roads and canals were built from east to west facilitating the movement of plantation products to different parts along the coastal line. The development of the transport system in north Kerala was particularly characterised by the growth of railways<sup>a</sup> which was introduced for the movement of military troops into the interior. All these suggest that colonialism had played a significant role in the process of urbanisation in Kerala. In a sense, urbanisation in Kerala was a depended one like majority of the

third world countries.

### 2.3 Summary

Urban centres began to appear in Kerala only in the post medieval period when the economy was by degrees integrated into the world system of modern capitalism. This earlier settlements which were apparently urban were mere trade centres of foreign merchants and both in the ancient as well as in the medieval period there were no indigeneous dynamics of urbanisation in Kerala. This was mainly due to the lack of the development of the pre-requisites of urban growth such as political power and technological improvements. It was the colonial initiative for a systematic trade and political sovereignty that finally led to the emanation of urban forms in this region. It will be interesting at this juncture to understand the various dimensions of this depended urbanisation in the 20th century. Next Chapter is an attempt to understand the patterns and process of urbanisation in Kerala since 1901.

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## Notes

1. There is hardly any consensus among historians regarding the period of Sangam literary texts. Speculating a timebracket from 300 BC to 600 AD would be in order.
2. For example See Kunjan Pillai P.N. Elankulam (1979) where he discusses the glory of ancient cities in Kerala.
3. This trend in Kerala history could be seen in M.G.S. Narayan (1977) Balakrishnan P.K. (1983) Rajan Gurukkal (1987) etc.
4. In the sangam literary texts, the region is divided into five thinais. They are kurinji, Palai, Mullai, Marudam, and Neythal. People living in different thinais performed different economic functions. For example the people living in Neythal land will produce salt and catch fish. Paddy cultivation was the occupation of the people living in Marudam and Mullai etc. For a discussion on inter thinai exchanges See J.V. Chelliah (1962).
5. One stadia is 183.48 metres.
6. For a detailed discussion of this aspect see Balakrishnan P.K. (1983) and Rajan Gurukkal (1987).
7. A systematic critique of child's formulation is provided in Thakkur, V.K. (1981).
8. Rajan Gurukkal (1987) has explained the nature of production and distribution system as it existed in ancient Kerala.
9. Calicut emerged as a prominent trading centre by a mighty upheaval of Asian trade in the middle of the 13th century. For details See Gupta, Ashin Das (1967)
10. Panikkar, K.M. (1929) discusses at length the political scenerio of Kerala during that period.
11. Travellers like Barbosa had suggested that even the use of animal motive power was absent in Kerala at that period. See Gibb, H.A.R. (1970)
12. Similar processes are observed in other parts of the world

also. See for example, Feil, M and Sada, P(1984,18).

13. The nature of these economic processes in Travancore has been analysed in detail by Nadar, Mahadevan (1980)
14. The development of modern transport began in Kerala only in the second half of the 19th century though the first land routes were built during 1776-1793. For a discussion on the history of transport development in Kerala See Ibrahim(1978).

## Chapter III

### THE URBAN QUESTION SINCE 1901

#### 3.0 Introduction

Large scale urban protrusion characterised by the proliferation of concentrated settlements with diversified economic activities gathered momentum around the beginning of the 20th century. The patterns and processes of this phenomenon appears to be distinctly different from other regions of the world which shared a common heritage of the juxtaposition of the colonial capital on indigeneous subsistence economy.

Studies on the urban question in Kerala are rather scarce (1) and this necessitates an original enquiry into the process of spatial formation in the state. We would focuss only on certain key aspects which we feel are fundamental to the understanding of the relationship between spatial forms and social processes.

#### 3.1 Record of urbanisation since 1901.

Kerala has had a relatively slow but consistent growth in its urban population (See Table 3.1). From 7.11 per cent in 1901 the degree of urbanisation (the percentage of population living in urban areas as defined in the census) has increased to 18.78 per cent in 1981. But a cursory glance at the Table 3.1 would reveal that Kerala has been invariably lagging behind the



Table 3.1: Growth of urban population in Kerala and India, 1901-1981

Year	Kerala			India		
	Degree of urbanisation	Annual growth rate of urban population	Urban Rural Growth Differential	Degree of urbanisation	Annual growth rate of urban population	Urban Rural growth differential
1901	7.11	-	-	11.0	-	-
1911	7.34	1.54	0.39	10.4	0.0	-0.61
1921	8.73	2.98	2.23	11.3	0.79	0.97
1931	9.64	3.46	1.39	12.2	1.77	0.03
1941	10.84	3.05	1.60	14.1	2.82	1.71
1951	13.48	5.27	3.35	17.6	3.52	2.70
1961	15.11	3.99	1.75	18.3	2.34	0.46
1971	16.24	3.57	1.11	20.2	3.26	1.29
1981	18.78	3.76	2.20	23.7	3.86	2.11

Source: Census of India, 1981

Note : The figures for India exclude Assam and Jammu and Kashmir

corresponding all-India figures through out the eight decades. Despite the recent acceleration in the pace of urbanisation in Kerala, especially in the last two decades, it is one of the lowest in India. Kerala ranks only thirteenth among Indian states in the level of urbanisation (See Table 3.2)

The different indices of urbanisation given in Table 3.1 indicate that though the annual rate of growth of urban population is higher in Kerala than all-India, the pace of

Table 3.2: Comparative figures for the level of  
urbanisation 1981

State	Degree of urbanisation
1. Maharashtra	35.03
2. Tamil Nadu	32.98
3. Gujarat	31.08
4. Karnataka	29.91
5. Punjab	27.72
6. West Bengal	26.49
7. Manipur	26.44
8. Andhra Pradesh	23.25
9. Haryana	21.96
10. Jammu & Kashmir	21.00
11. Rajasthan	20.93
12. Madhya Pradesh	20.31
13. Kerala	18.78
14. Meghalaya	18.03
15. Uttar Pradesh	18.01
16. Sikkim	16.23
17. Nagaland	15.54
18. Bihar	12.46
19. Orissa	11.82
20. Tripura	10.98
21. Himachal Pradesh	7.72

Source: Census of India, 1981

urbanisation has not experienced any secular acceleration since the turn of the century. From 1901 to 1931, what we discern is an acceleration in the rate of urbanisation where as it decelerated in the following decade. An unprecedented speed is experienced in the decade 1941-1951 followed by a sharp deceleration in the subsequent decades (2). The latest picture is one of acceleration again.

The urban-rural growth differential (the difference between the annual rate of growth of rural population and urban population, (hereafter URGD) shows that for Kerala, the pace of

urbanisation was higher only during the 1941-51 decade only in the last two decades we find a convergence in the trends in URGD for Kerala and India. The variations in URGD are likely to be the result of the variations in the rate of growth of rural population. Thus URGD becomes highly sensitive to the emergence of new urban units and declassification of urban units as rural (Nagaraj, 1985).

Table 3.3: Co-efficient of variation for agup and urgd 1901-1981

India/States	Annual growth rate of urban population (%)	Urban Rural growth differential
Kerala	29	47
Tamil Nadu	41	49
Karnataka	55	83
Andhra Pradesh	70	108
India	56	81

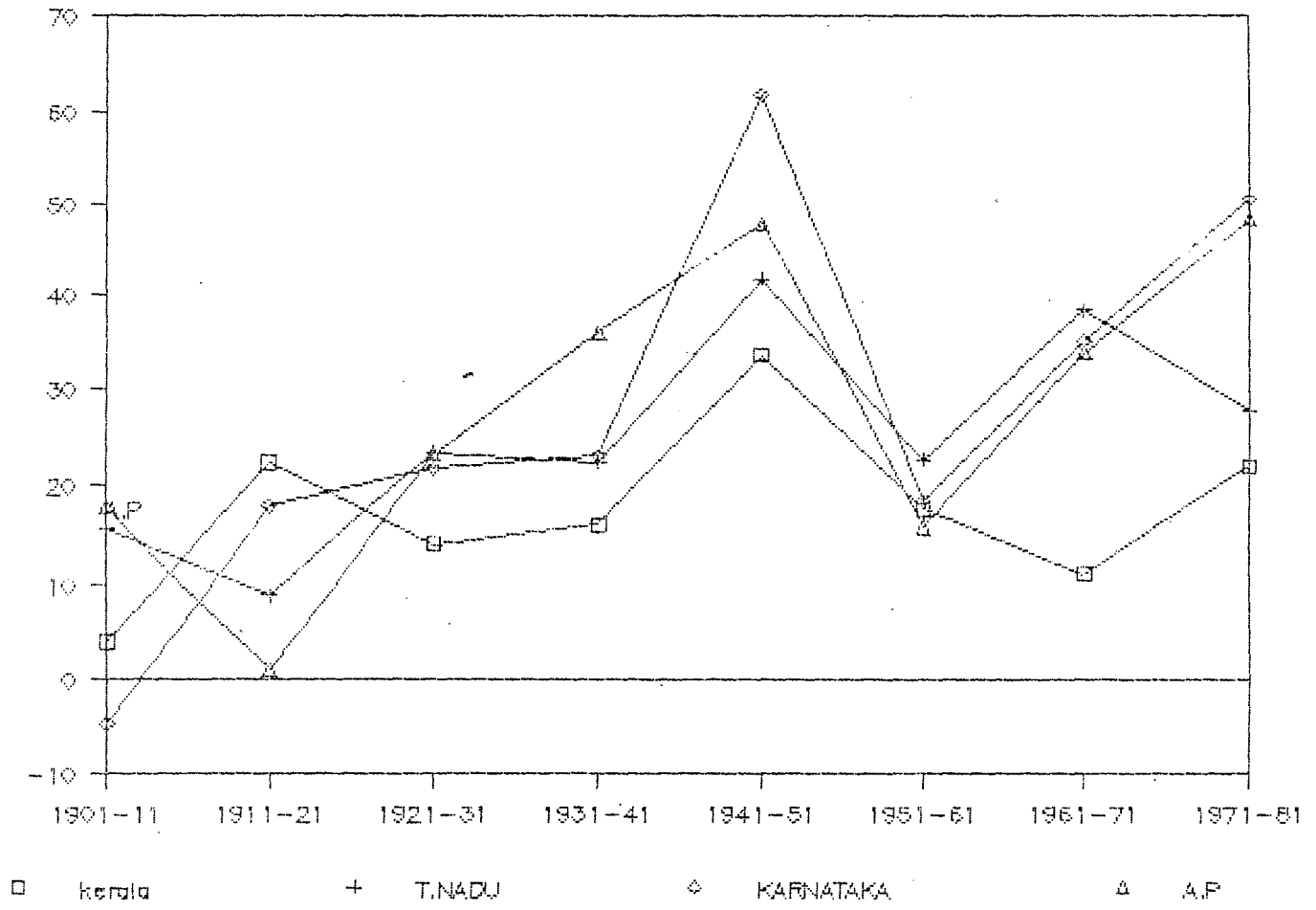
Source: Census of India, 1981

Table 3.3 gives the co-efficient of variation for annual rate of growth of urban population and URGD for Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and India. In both cases the figure for Kerala are the lowest. Figure 3.1 also indicates that Kerala's urban growth path is characterised by lesser fluctuations compared to the experience of other South Indian states.

### 3.2 Distribution of urban population by districts

A cursory exploration into the district wise distribution of urban population would reveal that a major proportion of urban population is concentrated in coastal districts like Cannanore, Kozhikode, Ernakulam, Alleppey, Quilon and Trivandrum (See Table

Fig 3.1  
URGD



3.4). Ernakulam stands out as having the largest proportion of urban population in 1981 (21.02%). At the other extreme is Idduki with 0.94 per cent. It can be observed that the significance of Alleppey, Kozhikode, Kottayam, Trivandrum and Palghat have been declining overtime. Cannanore and Trichur with an addition of 18 new urban units in each, show an increase in their share of urban population. It seems that the under-developed districts like Malappuram and Idduki are slowly picking up.

### 3.3 Distribution of urban settlements by districts

All except one district (Waynad) in Kerala had urban settlements in 1981. It can be seen from Table 3.5 that the distribution of towns and cities over space has never been uniform since 1901. It is interesting to note that in 1981 though Cannanore and Trichur contributes only 24.5 per cent of the total urban population, more than 48 per cent of the total urban units are located in these two districts together. This is due to the emergence of a large number of small towns in these districts in the 1981 census. In the case of districts like Kozhikode, Palghat, Kottayama, Alleppey, Quilon and Trivandrum. We have already noticed that there is a decline in their share of urban population to state's urban population (Table 3.4). This is duely reflected in the figures for the share of urban settlements also. Table 3.5 also reveals the nature of the temporal transformation in the ordering of space in Kerala since 1901.

### 3.4 The degree of urbanisation by districts

The degree of urbanisation for Kerala is 18.78 per cent in 1981. But a disaggregated analysis at the district level reveals

Table 3.4: Distribution of population (urban) by districts (percent) 1901-1981

District	Year								
	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981
Cananore	12.25	12.67	9.19	8.05	6.90	6.82	11.75	9.37	13.74
Kozhikode	19.42	17.07	13.53	12.06	13.65	12.50	14.86	16.20	12.79
Malappuram	2.32	4.27	3.16	2.78	3.53	3.49	2.97	3.60	3.73
Palghat	12.87	12.20	10.04	8.02	8.32	8.04	8.83	6.18	4.33
Trichur	6.87	7.74	7.59	9.65	10.01	8.10	7.27	7.21	10.79
Ernakulam	16.32	16.65	14.17	16.43	15.88	14.35	15.48	18.35	21.02
Idukki	-	-	-	0.38	0.35	0.58	-	0.73	0.94
Kottayama	7.00	6.17	8.35	8.54	7.88	8.40	6.48	6.02	3.33
Alleppey	6.75	7.52	12.92	13.17	11.90	12.16	12.15	10.38	7.83
Quilon	3.45	3.59	6.07	6.32	6.67	7.86	5.65	5.48	7.76
Trivandrum	12.73	12.12	14.97	14.60	14.89	16.82	17.56	16.49	13.94
All	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Note: Wynad District is completely rural

Source: Census of India, 1981

Table 3.5: Distribution of urban settlements by Districts (percent) 1901-1981

District	Year									
	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	
Cannanore	9.52	11.11	6.82	5.66	4.83	4.26	19.57	14.77	24.53	
Kozhikode	9.52	7.41	4.55	3.77	6.45	4.26	14.13	11.36	5.66	
Malappuram	4.76	7.41	4.55	3.77	6.45	4.26	5.43	5.68	3.77	
Palghat	14.29	14.81	6.82	5.66	9.68	9.58	6.52	6.82	3.77	
Trichur	14.29	11.11	9.09	11.32	12.90	10.64	7.61	10.22	23.59	
Ernakulam	19.05	22.22	15.91	16.98	14.52	13.82	13.04	12.50	15.09	
Idduki	-	-	-	1.89	1.61	4.26	-	2.27	1.89	
Kottayam	9.52	7.41	11.36	11.32	9.68	10.64	7.60	9.09	3.77	
Alleppey	9.52	11.11	15.91	15.09	12.90	9.50	8.70	9.09	6.60	
Quilon	4.76	3.70	9.09	9.43	8.07	9.58	3.26	4.55	5.67	
Trivandrum	4.76	3.70	15.91	15.09	12.90	19.15	14.13	11.36	5.67	
All	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	

Note: Wayanad district is completely rural.

Source: Census of India 1981

Table 3.6: Degree of Urbanisation by Districts

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981
Cannanore	7.31	8.18	7.49	7.65	7.60	9.46	17.76	14.53	23.39
Kozhikode	14.47	13.68	13.59	7.65	18.30	20.44	27.04	30.83	27.18
Malappuram	1.55	3.00	2.82	13.87	4.32	5.54	5.48	6.73	7.40
Palghat	7.66	7.81	8.00	2.91	9.70	12.09	10.87	12.70	10.11
Trichur	4.57	5.28	6.35	7.81	10.37	11.70	11.00	11.74	21.10
Ernakulam	11.48	11.88	12.22	8.90	16.19	18.79	23.27	29.40	39.56
Idukki	-	-	-	1.84	1.71	3.22	-	3.29	4.60
Kottayam	7.06	6.64	9.71	10.10	8.93	13.54	12.60	13.57	9.37
Alleppey	4.60	5.16	9.71	10.71	11.20	15.02	15.94	16.92	15.90
Quilon	3.00	3.13	5.78	6.33	7.00	9.70	8.00	8.93	15.75
Trivandrum	11.95	11.16	15.30	15.62	17.54	23.13	25.71	26.00	25.26
State	7.11	7.34	8.73	9.64	10.84	13.48	15.11	16.24	18.78

Source: Census of India 1981



that there is marked variation from this mean (See Table 3.6)

In 1901, the districts that showed a level of urbanisation above the state average were Cannanore, Kozhikode, Palghat, Ernakulam and Trivandrum. In 1981, all these districts except Palghat still exceeds the state's average i.e. 18.78 per cent. The degree of urbanisation in Trichur in 1981 has come above the state's average (21.10 per cent). The most urbanised districts are located along the coastal plane. The least urbanised districts are obviously in the high land.

The last decade is characterised by a spectacular increase in the degree of urbanisation in Cannanore, Trichur and Ernakulam. In Cannanore, the increase was from 14.53 per cent to 23.39, in Trichur from 11.74 per cent to 21.10 per cent and in Ernakulam from 29.4 per cent to 39.56 per cent. It may also be interesting to note that the two highly urbanised districts, - Kozhikode and Trivandrum - showed a slight decline in their urbanisation levels during the last decade.

### 3.5 Spatial dispersion of towns

It has already been noted that the degree of urbanisation in Kerala is very low (18.78 per cent). But the town density (number of towns per 1000 sq.km.) is relatively very high. Table 3.7 shows the figures for town density in the four South Indian states and all-India for the years 1961, 1971 and 1981. It can be seen that only Andhra Pradesh is strikingly similar to the all-India picture. Not surprisingly Kerala is on the other extreme. Higher town density is an indication of the better diffusion of towns and also urban features over space. The picture of towns density across different size classes would be

Table 3.7: Number of towns per 1000 km<sup>2</sup> 1961 -1981

India/ State	1961	Year 1971	1981
Kerala	2.367	2.264	2.728
Tamil Nadu	1.999	1.845	1.884
Karnataka	1.111	1.184	1.304
Andhra Pradesh	0.771	0.749	0.851
India	0.709	0.770	0.987

Source: Census of India, 1981

of much interest. Table 3.8 gives the number of towns in each size class and town density for the years 1961, 1971 and 1981. It shows that the crowd of medium towns in Kerala accounts for its higher town density.

High town density in itself does not preclude the possibility for the emergence of new towns. The majority of towns are now clustered in the coastal low land. Another set of towns have emerged in the mid land along main-central road in Trivandrum-Kottayam stretch. Of the 6 class I towns, 5 are on the coastal strip. Towns in the high land region including the remaining class I town are in the Palghat gap.

Table 3.8: Number of towns and town Density across size class  
1961-1981

Size Class	Number of Towns			Town Density		
	1961	1971	1981	1961	1971	1981
I	4	5	6	0.103	0.129	0.154
II	5	7	8	0.129	0.180	0.206
III	31	40	64	0.798	1.029	1.647
IV	33	25	21	0.849	0.643	0.540
V	18	9	6	0.463	0.232	0.154
VI	7	2	1	0.026	0.051	0.026

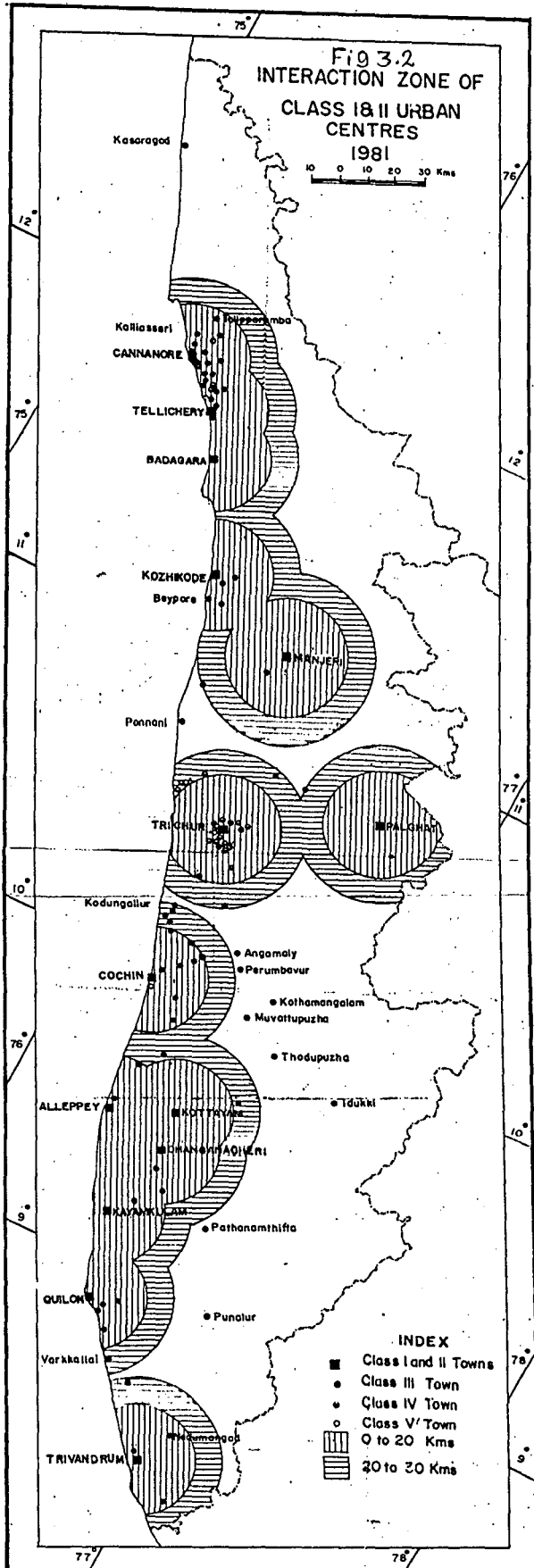
Source: Census of India, 1981

If we draw 20 and 30 kilometre distance zones around class I and class II towns (See figure 3.2) it can be seen that the major part of the state in low and mid land is well covered. It occurs that 72 per cent of the towns are located within the 20 kilometre zone parallel to the coast line.

### 3.6: Growth of towns

To study the rate of growth of towns belonging to different size classes two methods are usually adopted: (i) the instantaneous method and (ii) the continuous method. In the first method tabulations are based on size classes without making allowance to the fact that the number of towns in each size class may change between censuses. In the second method in order to calculate the growth rates for towns belonging to different size classes, the same set of urban units are considered. This gives a precise record of the growth performance of different towns

FIG 3.2  
INTERACTION ZONE OF  
CLASS I & II URBAN  
CENTRES  
1981



- INDEX**
- Class I and II Towns
  - Class III Town
  - Class IV Town
  - Class V Town
  - ▨ 0 to 20 Kms
  - ▧ 20 to 30 Kms

across size classes (3).

Table 3.9 gives the growth rates for towns in different size classes for the period 1961-1981 calculated using the continuous method. It can be seen that except for class III

Table 3.9: Growth rate for towns belonging to different size classes in 1961

Size class	Decadal Growth rates	
	1961-1971	1971-1981
I	53.06	16.22
II	20.92	9.99
III	17.20	16.26
IV	55.34	34.06

Source: Census of India, 1981

towns, there are wide variations in the growth performance of towns. Class III towns show a remarkable degree of consistency in their growth. Class IV towns also show a comparatively lower variation. But bigger towns are wavering too much in their growth performance. The sluggishness of class II towns in the second decade is indeed striking. Invariably for towns in all size classes, the growth rate has come down in 1971-81 decade.

### 3.7 Migration streams and urban growth

Analysis of migration statistics is of vital significance in the study of urbanisation. Conventionally, it is argued that certain "pull factors" operate in the urban areas which attract people in the rural country side and thus contribute to urban growth, suburbanisation etc. Along with this, there could be some "push factors" in the rural areas which force people to quit village life and migrate to cities. The major streams of migration are (i) rural to rural (ii) rural to urban (iii) urban

to rural and (iv) urban to urban. Table 3.10 gives a picture of these migration streams. It can be seen that migrants are

Table 3.10: Percent distribution of Intra state Lifetime Migrants in Kerala in 1961 and 1971

Migration stream	1961	1971
Rural-Rural	78.6	75.9
Urban-Rural	6.1	8.7
Rural-Urban	10.9	11.7
Urban - Urban	4.3	3.7
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Census of India (Migration Tables) 1961, 1971

heavily concentrated in the rural to rural stream (4). But it must also be noted that the 1971 census shows a decline in the percentage share of rural to rural migrants compared to 1961 census. At the same time the share of urban to rural migrants has increased over time (from 6.1 per cent to 8.7). The second important stream is however the rural to urban stream. It shows a very marginal increase from 10.9 in the 1961 census to 11.7 in 1971. The figures for urban to urban migration seems to be quite insignificant.

Incidentally, the majority of the immigrants to Kerala are to rural areas (See Table 3.11) But it seems that overtime, as

Table 3.11: Percentage distribution of Life time in migrants from outside the state classified by place of Residence at the place of Enumeration - 1961 and 1971

Place of Enumeration	Persons	1961		1971		
		Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
Rural	73.9	72.4	75.6	69.2	68.2	70.3
Urban	26.1	27.6	24.4	30.8	31.6	29.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Census of India (Migration tables 1961, 1971)

the level of urbanisation increases, the immigration stream would direct itself to the urban areas at the data suggests.

At this juncture, a close look at the volume of rural to urban migration in Kerala would be in order. The contribution of rural to urban migrants to the urban population of Kerala is 15.5 per cent (See Table 3.12). The same for all India is 21 per cent (Singh, J.P, 1986:93). Table 3.12 also illustrates that at the district level as well as at State level, the majority of the rural migrants in urban areas are from within the state.

Table 3.12: Percentage of Rural-urban migrants to the total urban population by Districts, 1971

District	Migrants from		Total
	Within State	Outside State	
Cannanore	25.9	1.8	27.7
Kozhikode	11.4	0.4	11.8
Malappuram	12.4	0.3	12.7
Palghat	19.4	1.1	20.5
Trichur	20.0	0.3	21.1
Eranakulam	15.0	0.7	15.7
Kottayam	20.5	1.1	21.6
Alleppey	14.3	0.3	14.6
Quilon	15.2	1.3	16.5
Trivandrum	12.2	2.4	14.6
Total	14.6	0.9	15.5

Source: Census of India, 1971 (Migration tables)

rural migrants in urban areas are from within the State Kerala's urban population contains only less than one per cent of population from rural areas of other states. The proportion of rural migrants in urban population is highest in Cannanore (26 per cent) and lowest in Kozhikode (11 per cent).

### 3.8 Components of urbanisation

Urbanisation has two positive components and one negative component (Nagaraj, 1985). They are (i) the net addition to the population of already existing towns which continue to be towns either due to immigration or natural increase in population (we call this incremental component) (ii) increase in urban population due to the emergence of new towns (we call this extensional component) and (iii) decrease in urban population due to declassification erstwhile urban areas as rural (we call this decremental component). Table 3.13 shows the comparative figures

Table 3.13: Components of urbanisation in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, 1961-1981

Components of urbanisation	Kerala		Tamil Nadu	
	1961-1971	1971-1981	1961-1971	1971-1981
I Incremental Component	26.3 (73)	27.00 (71.8)	35.07 (91.23)	26.17 (94.18)
II Extensional component	23.3 (62)	22.00 (58.5)	7.78 (20.23)	2.50 (9.01)
III Declassificatory component	-13 (-36)	-11 (-30)	-4.40 (-11.46)	-0.89 (-3.19)
Total	36(100)	38(100)	38.44(100)	27.78(100)

Source: Census of India, 1971, 1981.

Note: Figures in brackets are corresponding percentages



for the components of urbanisation in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

It can be seen that in the case of Kerala both the extensional and the decremental components have played a very significant role compared to other states.

### 3.9. Summary

The process of urbanisation in Kerala is distinctly

different from other parts of India. The major differences are (i) the urban growth path shows a lesser degree of fluctuation (ii) very high spatial dispersion of towns (iii) slower rate of growth of towns over time (iv) insignificant role of rural to urban migration in over all growth of urban population (v) higher proportion of extensional and decremental components in total urban growth etc. The causative factors for this differential performance are many. Before discussing these in detail we would like to provide a snap shot of the urban system as it emerges in Modern Kerala.

## Notes

1. There are two studies which attempt at a comparison of urbanisation patterns in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, Sankran Narayanan (1977) and C.M> Abraham (1983). V.A. Janaki (1954) made study on functional classification of urban settlements in Kerala. But it was mainly based on 1941 census. Another study forthcoming is on the state of urbanisation in Kerala by Srikumar Chaopadhyay of Centre for Earth Science Studies, Trivandrum.
2. The first post colonial census was in 1951 and this was conducted with more rigour leading to lesser undercounting than previous censuses. In 1961, however there were some major definitional changes as to designate an area as urban resulting in the declassification of many of the erstwhile urban areas as rural.
3. For a discussion of the relative merits and demerits of these methods see Rakesh Mohan and Panth (1982).
4. Rural to rural migration is the dominant stream in many Indian states. In terms of volume this stream seems to be smaller in Kerala compared to other states. For example in Bihar it is 86 per cent and in West Bengal it is 81 per cent according to 1971 census (See J.P. Singh, 1986).

## Chapter IV

### THE MODERN URBAN SYSTEM

#### 4.0. Introduction

Conventionally an urban system would mean the set of cities and towns in a region or nation and its attributes. But it has been rightly pointed out that the urban systems are more complex mechanisms characterised by the inter-dependency of urban units and their interaction with the rural hinterland. This complexity is the recognition that urban systems are social systems rather than simply mechanical or natural systems. Nor are they strictly economic or political systems. As social systems, an urban system could be inherently complex, highly unstable and continually evolving in response to influences from outside. And also such system might exhibit an impressive internal capacity for self regulation through mechanisms that could dictate their form and evolution (1). In this chapter we would like to understand the basic features of Kerala's urban system in terms of its hierarchical fabrication, functional structure, stability etc.

#### 4.1 Articulation of the system

As we have seen in the last chapter majority of the towns

in Kerala are along the coastal line. Initially there were few

Table 4.1: Road and Rail Density in Travancore-Cochin and Malabar (in miles per 100 square miles of Area)

Year	Travancore		Cochin		Malabar	
	Road	Rail	Road	Rail	Road	Rail
1900-01	30.5	-	32.0	-	30.0	1.70
1905-06	43.0	0.90	32.0	3.32	31.0	2.26
1910-11	44.0	0.90	34.0	3.32	32.0	2.26
1915-16	45.0	0.90	35.0	3.32	31.0	2.26
1920-21	51.0	1.52	36.0	3.32	31.0	2.26
1925-26	54.0	1.52	36.0	3.32	31.0	2.26
1930-31	57.4	1.54	39.0	3.32	32.0	3.07
1933-36	60.0	1.54	39.0	3.82	NA	3.45
1940-41	62.4	1.54	40.9	3.82	NA	3.45
1945-46	62.5	1.54	43.0	3.02	NA	3.45

Note: Figures of road density relating to Malabar for the years 1900-01, 1905-06 and 1910-11 actually relate to 1901-02, 1906-07 and 1911-12 respectively.

Source: Ibrahim P (1978)

links between these towns. They served as gateway cities (2) of international trade by colonialists. But with the development of transport facilities these towns were by and large congrafted into a regional urban system. There was a steady increase in the road and rail density in the state in all the three regions Malabar, Cochin and Travancore since 1900 (See Table 4.1). In the post colonial period also there was an impressive transport growth. Now Kerala has the highest road density (242 kilometers per 100 square kilometers of area) among Indian states. Only West Bengal and Tamil Nadu have come nearer to Kerala's performance (See Table 4.2). Table 4.3 shows the

Table 4.2: Road length in different states (as on 1978-79)

	Total Road Length per lakh of popu	100 km of area
Andhra Pradesh	207	38
Assam	305	73
Bihar	120	46
Gujarat	162	27
Haryana	243	67
Himachal Pradesh	581	43
Jammu and Kashmir	303	8
Kerala	369	232
Madhya Pradesh	202	23
Maharashtra	274	53
Karnataka	309	55
Orissa	457	74
Punjab	285	91
Tamil Nadu	360	130
Rajasthan	186	18
Uttar Pradesh	178	64
West Bengal	266	158
All India	245	49

Source: Transport system in Kerala: Background paper for the high level committee on physical infrastructure and transport, State Planning Board, Trivandrum, 1983.

length and density of roads in Kerala from 1961-1981. It can be seen that historically Kerala possesses a fairly developed road network. Figure 4.1 shows the structure of the transport system in present day Kerala. The links among towns as well as with their hinterlands is very obvious.

#### 4.2 Urban hierarchy

Usually urban systems are characterised by the existence of a dominant node i.e. a primate city. (3). This is manifested by the share of the biggest city in its total urban population and urban economic activities. One fundamental feature of Kerala's urban system is the conspicuous absence of such a dominant node (See Table 4.4). It is seen that the degree of

Fig 4.1

# KERALA STATE

## COMMUNICATIONS ROADS AND RAILWAYS

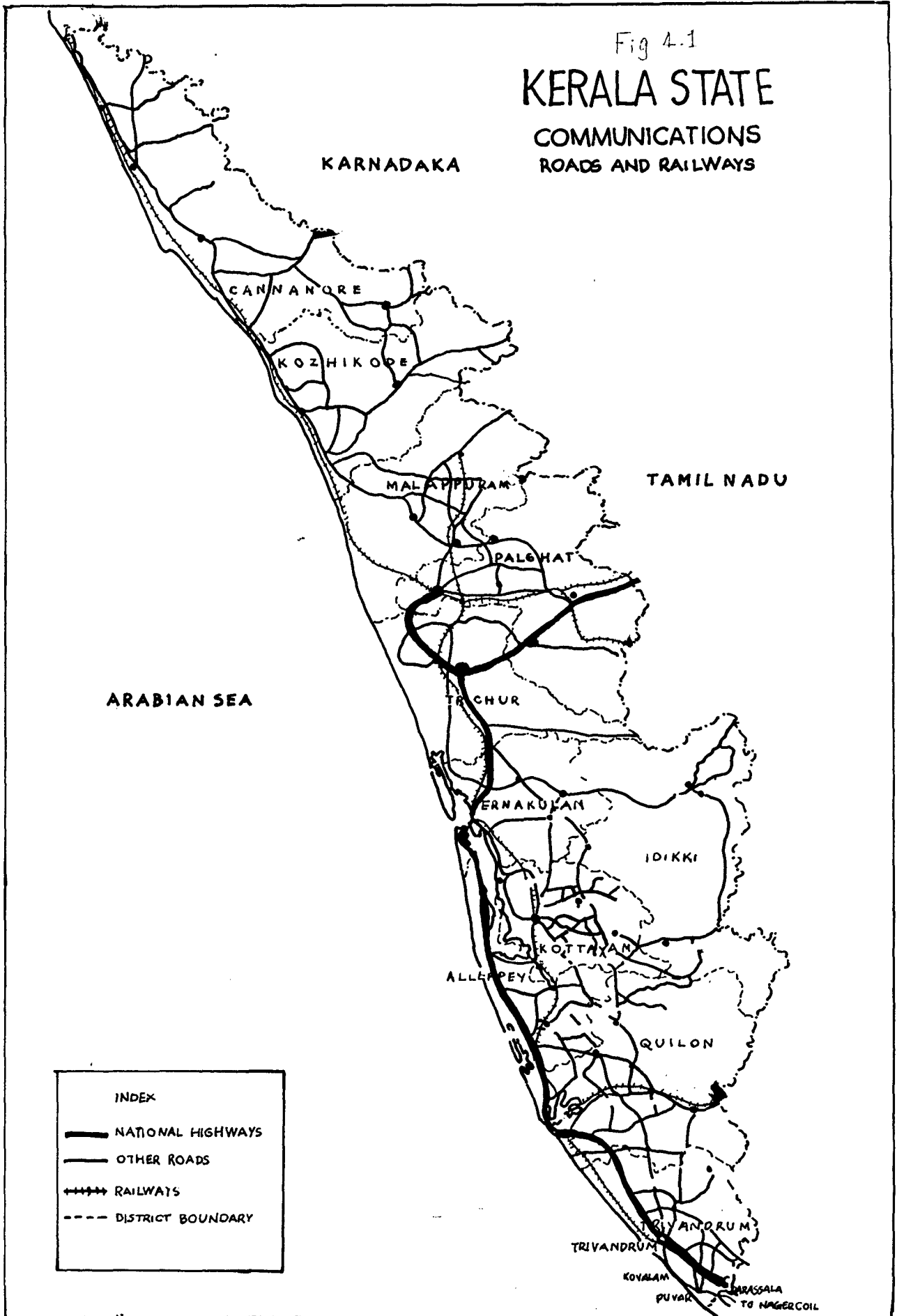


Table 4.3: Length and Density of Roads in Kerala

	Length of Roads per lakh of population	100 sq.km.
1960-61	232	101
1970-71	347	190
1980-81	371	242

Source: Transport system in Kerala: Background paper for the high level committee on physical infrastructure and Transport, State Planning Board, Trivandrum 1983.

concentration of population and urban activity in the biggest city is the lowest in Kerala compared to Calcutta, Madras and Bombay in their respective urban systems. Coming to the role of Class I cities in Kerala's urban system, we would argue that they have become the nodes of the six urban sub-systems of towns in Kerala. Figure 4.2 shows the domination of these pre-eminent nodes in their respective tributary regions. But at the same time it must be noted that the average size of these Class I cities in Kerala is less than that of all-India (See Table 4.5).

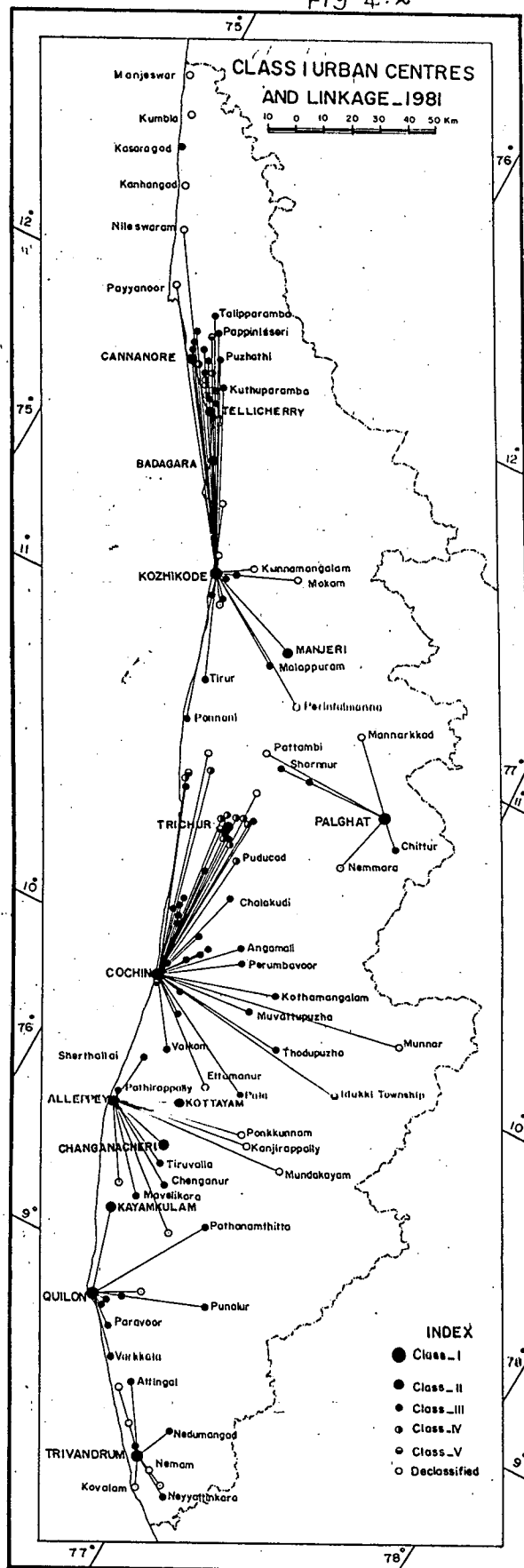
#### 4.4: Population and Urban activity Ratios in the Primate city - 1971

Concentration Ratios	Madras	Bombay	Calcutta	Cochin
Population	25.43	38.00	64.11	12.67
Manufacturing other than household				
Industry	29.33	58.20	79.32	14.52
Trade and Commerce	24.97	49.95	72.52	13.03
Transport, Storage and Communication	41.32	49.49	29.51	21.12
Other services	27.93	40.37	68.41	15.31

Source: Census of India, 1971

Equally important is the fact that Kerala exhibits a low degree

Fig 4.2





of concentration of population in the big cities. Table 4.6

Table 4.5: Average Size of Towns in Kerala and India, 1971

Size class	Average Size	
	Kerala	India
I	2,93,409	4,01,524
II	66,243	66,783
III	27,535	30,609
IV	14,025	14,068
V	8,280	7,537
VI	4,566	3,126
Total	39,391	37,243

Source: Census of India, 1971

gives the concentration of urban population in different size classes of towns in the year 1981 for the South Indian states. It can be observed that the Kerala pattern is distinctly different. In all the other three states we find that more than 50 per cent of the urban population is concentrated in the big cities. The role of small and medium towns in these states are quite insignificant.

#### 4.3 Functional Structure

Functional classification of towns is an important field in urban studies which essentially deals with the spatial ordering in the distribution and structure of urban functions in an urban system (Smith, 1965). Uneven economic processes of development in a nation state or geographical unit result in different patterns of urban evolution and spatial structuring of the economic base of different cities and towns. Thus, the towns and cities of an urban system are made up of a series of layers which ostensibly reflect the spatial imprint of development (Berry and Horton, 1970) (4).

An attempt to understand the functional fabrication of the urban settlements in Kerala was first made by Janaki (1954). The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of physical and economic factors on the functions of towns in Kerala and of the interrelation between the functions and growth of towns. It was argued that the towns in Kerala originated as fishing villages or as seats of local chieftains as in China (5) and many of them were fortified and garrisoned by subsequent invaders and commerce became the most important function. Apart from commercial and industrial functions three other functional groups were delineated. They are (i) administrative towns (ii) agricultural market towns and (iii) temple towns. Alleppey, Mattachery, Cannanore, Ernakulam, Palghat, Cochin, Quilon and Nagaccoil (now in Tamil Nadu) were identified as commercial and industrial towns. Trivandrum and Calicut were serving predominantly administrative functions. Changanassery, Kottayam and Neyyanttinkara were identified as major agricultural market towns. Varkala, Ettumanoor and Vaikom were some of the famous temple towns. A precise quantitative classification of towns was not attempted due to lack of information (Janaki, 1954).

We would argue that before classifying towns into functional groups an enquiry into their resource base is in order. Historically export of indigeneous commodities like pepper, coir, timber, spices etc. has been of paramount importance in the economy of Kerala. This infact had tremendous impact in the emanation of trade based urban centres along the coastal plane. Hill produces were thus the primary resource base of the trade centres. In the 1872 census the port towns of Cannanore, Tellichery, Calicut and Cochin along with 33 other

minor and medium ports were identified as specialising in the export of various plantation as well as other hill produces. A preliminary analysis of the 1971 census data also revealed that the predominance of plantation products in the trading spectrum of urban centres in Kerala still persist. 65 per cent of the towns in 1971, manufactured commodities related to plantation based products. In 58 per cent of the towns plantation products are the most important commodity manufactured. 92 per cent of the towns import plantation based products. In 44 per cent of the towns the major export items were plantation based products (6).

Processing and trading activities based on commercial agriculture forms and integral part of Kerala's economy. This is naturally reflected in the employment pattern observed in the urban settlements. The 1971 census had classified the towns in Kerala into three broad categories (i) mono-functional (ii) bi-functional and (iii) multi-functional. Table 4.7 illustrates the

Table 4.6: Share of urban population by size class of towns, 1981

Size Class	Population concentration			
	Kerala	Tamil Nadu	Karnataka	Andhra Pradesh
I	39.84	62.19	58.60	53.69
II	10.74	15.99	6.46	16.17
III	42.38	12.52	17.75	20.95
IV	5.93	7.40	13.74	7.32
V	1.02	1.76	2.87	1.75
VI	0.09	0.14	0.58	0.12
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Census of India, 1981

distribution of towns according their functional category in different size classes. Of the 25 mono-functional towns in 1971, 13 were under primary activity (7). There were 9 towns where

industrial employment was the major component. In two towns the major share of employment was in the service activity (see also figure 4.3). Secondary activities do not play a very significant role in the urban economy of the State (See Table 4.7). On the

Table 4.7: Industrial classification of urban workforce 1971

Sector	Kerala	India
Primary	19.3	13.8
Secondary	22.4	27.9
Tertiary	58.3	58.3
Total	100.00	100.00

Source: Census of India, 1971

other hand the primary sector has a greater say compared to the all India picture. It must also be noted that it is the agro processing industries that dominate the secondary sector in Kerala.

#### 4.4 Stability of the system

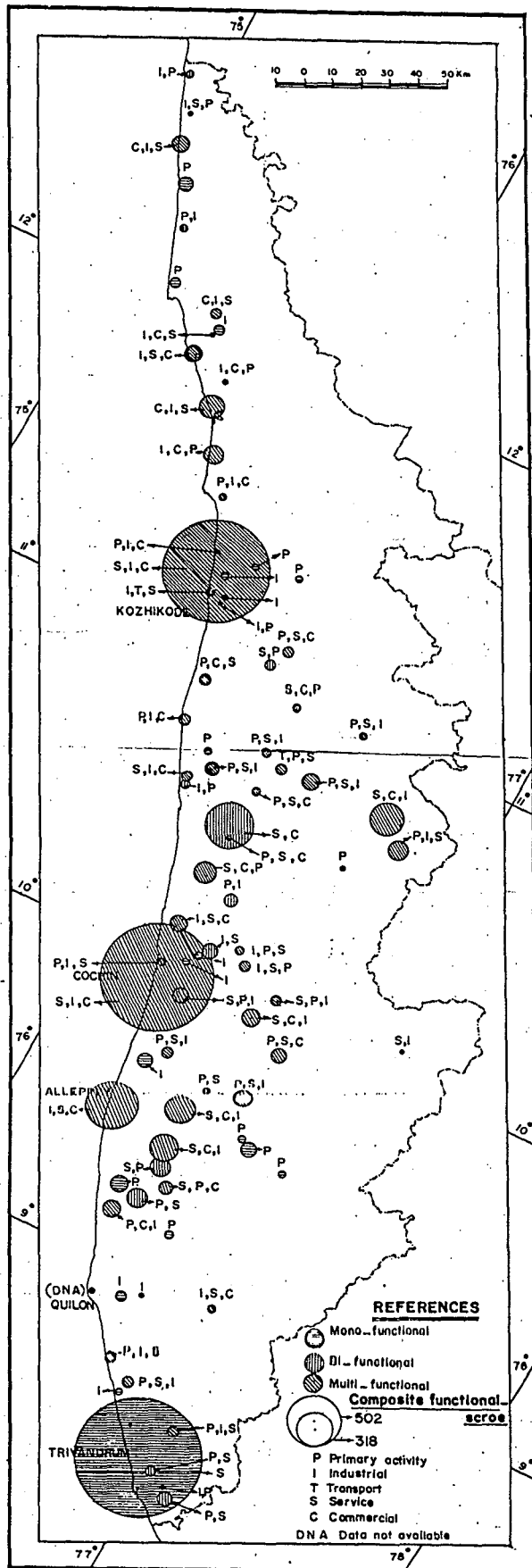
In the study of urban systems, the notion of stability and instability is of vital significance. This refers to the proliferation and disappearance of urban units in a given

Table 4.8: Distribution of towns by functional category 1971

Size Class	Mono-functional	bi-functional	Multi-functional	Total
I	1	-	4	5
II	-	1	6	7
III	11	9	20	40
IV	8	4	13	25
V	4	-	5	9
VI	1	1	-	2
Total	25	15	48	88

Source: Census of India, 1971

Fig 4.3  
 FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF  
 URBAN CENTRES - 1971



geographical area. The practical value of the concept of stability in the study of urban systems have been discussed elsewhere (See Nagraj, 1985). Since the urban units are defined in terms of spatial concentration of population on the basis of certain limits of dimension density and occupational heterogeneity, the stability of the system constituted by these units is influenced by three major factors. They are population growth, migration streams and occupational structure. In fact these three factors are inter-related in a specific manner. Population growth either due to natural increase or migration cannot in itself generate urban forms. As per the definition of urban area, only when the agricultural character of a particular region changes it could be designated as urban. Population growth can change the occupational ordering in a region.

We have seen in the last chapter that the increase in urban population due to the emergence of new towns (i.e. the extensional component) and the decrease in urban population due to de-classification of existing towns into villages is higher in Kerala. This points to a high degree of disorder in Kerala's urban system.

#### 4.5 Summary

In this chapter we essentially looked at the salient features of the modern urban system in Kerala. The system as we have seen was articulated by means of providing adequate links between different nodes through a well developed transport network. It is found that the hierarchical structure of the system is characterised by the absence of a primate city as its central node. The role of big cities in the system is also not very significant. The structuring of the economic base of the

system is in such a way that the usually held intensive correlation between industrialisation and urbanisation does not appear to be valid in the case of Kerala. Instead commercialised agriculture and trading activities seem to dominate the scene. Another significant feature of the system is its instability compared to other urban systems. It appears that the patterns of urbanisation that we observed in Chapter III fit in quite well with our analysis of the structure of the urban system. Now it is our task to delineate the major determinants of this specific spatial formation in Kerala.

## Notes

1. For a detailed account of the argument See Bourne and Simmons (1978)
2. A model of the development of gateway cities is provided in R.J. Johnston (1982, 70:2)
3. This has been held as a common feature of all third world urban systems. For a discussion of this aspect See Castells (1977), Mcgee (1971) etc.
4. Smith (1965) has done a critical review of the different methods of functional classification of towns. We have not followed any sophisticated quantitative methods such as Nelsons method etc. This is primarily because of the fact that the method used in the Indian census satisfied our analytical needs.
5. This argument appears to be highly diffused. It considers urbanisation in Kerala as a historical process having its own internal dynamics. The comparison with chinese urban process also appears to be not much valid.
6. Export does not mean export to outside Kerala only. This includes transfer of products from towns to other places also. See Census of India 1971, Town Directory.
7. Places specialising in primary activities are also considered as towns if they had pronounced urban characteristics as judged by the Director of Census operations after consultation with the State Government authorities.



## Chapter V

### SPATIAL FORMS AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

#### 5.0. Introduction

Production of spatial forms in any society is the result of complex mechanisms operating at several structural levels. These vary from region to region. In this chapter we intend to provide a scaffold explanation for the specificities related to the process of spatial formation in Kerala. To begin with let us recapitulate the major peculiarities involved in the process. We found that Kerala is characterised by a very low degree of urbanisation with a high spatial dispersal of towns. The level of population concentration is only very moderate. The dispersal of towns appeared to be confined to the narrow coastal strip. Majority of the towns are clustered in the low land. The degree and spread of urbanisation in the highland and the mid land are comparatively very low. The towns in the coastal strip in fact forms a continuous belt making the rural urban distinctions almost difficult. The modern urban system as it developed in Kerala is characterised by the conspicuous absence of a dominant node. The role played by the big cities in the urban system is also more or less insignificant. The functional structure of the system appears to be highly diversified. Another major feature of the urban system is that it is highly unstable. The emergence of new towns which contributes to urban extension has played a very significant role in 1960's and 1970's. At the same time the degree of declassification was also very high. This indicates a

high degree of disorder in the emerging urban system in Kerala. The already existing towns on the other hand showed very poor growth rates. These salient features of Kerala's urban evolution cannot be viewed in isolation. Instead, the intricate relations of these specific patterns with the historical geography of the development process must be scrutinized properly.

#### 5.1. Dependence and spatial structure

We have seen in Chapter 2 that towns began to emerge in Kerala as a result of its integration into the world system of capitalism. In fact the influx of British capital began entering into the region to a considerable extent only during the second half of the 19th century. British capital was mainly invested in the plantations (T.C. Varghese, 1972). The area under cash crop cultivation increased considerably during that period. In Travancore, various steps such as creation of titles to land, changes in the system of taxation and mode of payment abolition of slavery, the introduction of the Kanganji system for recruiting labour in the plantations, the abolition of viruthi, treatment of waste lands, import of paddy which in effect released land and labour from food crop cultivation etc. were taken under state initiative to promote cash crop cultivation (1). In the early decades of the 20th century, almost all the cash crops produced in Kerala had a growing demand from outside. Table 5.1 shows

Table 5.1: Area under cash crops (in thousands)

Year	Travancore	Cochin	Malabar
1920-21	899(46)	572(34)	103(20)
1930-31	948(45)	606(34)	143(26)
1940-41	1004(42)	667(37)	158(28)
1946-47	1073(46)	718(40)	152(25)

Notes: Figures in brackets are percentage to total cropped

Source : T.C. Varghese (1972)

the increase in the area under cash crops in Travancore Cochin and Malabar. More and more plantation companies were opened. Table 5.2 shows the increase in the number of plantation companies in Travancore in the first half of the 20th century. Within a span of 40 years there was a phenomenal increase in the number of plantation companies. The expansion of area under plantation crops is equally fascinating (See Table 5.3). It is observed in all the three regions, agriculture was diverted to produce goods for the world market and the peasants became dependent on the world market in two ways. On the one hand he was forced to buy goods produced in foreign countries and on the

Table 5.2: Planation companies in Travancore

Year	Number of registered plantation companies incorporated and working in Travancore	Number of registered plantation companies incorporated outside Travancore, but working in Travancore
1905	7	Not known
1915	10	Not known
1925	37	17
1935	38	23
1945	89	19

Source: Statistics of Travancore

Table 5.3: The Area under Plantation crops in Travancore (in thousands)

Year	Rubber	Tea	Coffee
1920-21	51.0	47.1	Nil
1925-26	53.6	67.7	Nil
1930-31	60.4	78.0	Nil
1935-36	96.7	77.6	6.2
1940-41	90.7	71.8	5.9
1945-46	111.6	77.4	7.0
1949-50	111.5	148.4	8.7

Source: Statistics of Travancore

other hand he was forced to sell his produce in the international market (Parameswaran, 1951). Marx (1972) in fact had observed this in his "Theories of surplus value" while making a distinction between different colonies: (2)

"There are colonies proper, such as the united states, Australia etc. Here the mass of the farming colonists, although they bring with them a larger or smaller amount of capital from the motherland, are not capitalists, nor do they carry on capitalist production. They are more or less peasants who work themselves and whose main object, in the first place, is to produce their own livelihood. In the second type of colonies - plantations - where commercial speculation figure from the start and production is intended for the world market, the capitalist mode of production exists, although only in a formal sense...."

The integration of particular regions into the global dynamics of capitalist accumulation in turn had affected the transformation of the spatial imprint in those regions. Agglomeration of population and productive forces in places of locational advantage becomes the rule. Many of the urban centres emerged as specialising<sup>in</sup> the export of various cash crops. Transport facilities were developed in such a manner that the plantation produce could be brought from the ghats directly to the ports. Many of the roads were built from east to west cutting across the main land. In addition to this Kerala possessed

numerous navigable water ways flowing down from the ghats to the coasts. During the 19th century canals were dug under colonial initiative which linked up these natural water ways.

Factories were established in the river mouths and these canals were used for floating down the timber and other hill produces including plantation products and for the carriage of heavy and bulky articles such as laterite, tiles coconut products etc.

(N. Subramanayam, 1932). This peculiar nature of transport development affected the spatial system in a unique manner. Though trade began to absorb large numbers of the population (Varughese, 1972) it did not lead to large scale of agglomeration of population and activities in particular region. Instead there developed a crowd of small towns along the coast which were in fact natural harbours or ports built under colonial initiative. Some inland towns also developed a centre of exchange and agro processing industries. This partly explains the unique spatial dispersal of towns and the absence of a dominant node in Kerala's urban system. The latter can also be due to the fact that the colonial administrative operations in the region were mainly concentrated in Madras which might have acted as a primate city.

The degree of urbanisation, as we have seen, was always very low in Kerala. Limits obviously existed to the progressive concentration of productive forces and population in few dominant centres. Large scale industrialisation, leading to agglomeration of people and capital did not take place. Table 5.4 reveals the

Table 5.4: The distribution of Industrial establishments in Travancore in 1921

Industries	Factories	Workers
Tea	51	8710
Rubber	5	706
Coir	90	5729
Other food industries	7	237
Wood Industries	4	330
Monazite sand	2	235
Factories	36	3357
Brick and Tile	7	303
Salt factories	11	724
Printing Press	33	797
Cotton Weaving	4	721
Metal Factories	8	3168
Others		

Source: Census of Travancore, 1921.

nature of industrialisation which was taking place in Kerala.

It can be observed that in Travancore, majority of the industries were of the agro-processing type. It can be seen that the major industries in Kerala are still based on the natural resource endowment of the region (Subramoniam, K.K. and Mohana Pillai, P.

1986). In addition to this there was a tendency among some of the major industries like beedi, coir, cashew handloom etc. to percolate down to small scale production and then to house hold production (3). Thus instead of a progressive concentration of productive forces, production was decentralised and it was moving down from higher forms of organisation to lower forms. So there were some structural limits for the small towns to grow at an accelerated pace. Thus it appears that the colonial factor is responsible for the emergence as well as the differential evolution of urban process in Kerala.

### 5.3. Settlement pattern and urban process

Another major factor which conditions the modern urban

system as it emerges in Kerala is the peculiar settlement pattern. It has been argued that the settlement pattern in Kerala has always been of the dispersed type (Menchers, 1966: 184). But this seems incorrect since the early settlers who entered Kerala through Palghat gap, Shenkota and Gundallor mountains might have formed nucleated settlements and gradually started spreading out to the midland and the low land (Rajan Gurukkal, 1986:231). However by the time of the visit of Ibn Batuta in the 14th century, the dispersed pattern had become dominant. Batuta records that:

"We next came to the country of black pepper, Malabar. Its length is a journey of two months from Sindabar to Kawlam. The whole way by land lies under the shade of trees... And in all this space of two months journey, there is not a space free from cultivation. For every man has his own orchard with his house in the middle and a wooden fence around it" (Batuta, 1929)

William Logan has noted that this description was equally applicable to the Malabar coast of his period also. (See Logan, 1981:111). But as we have already noted, the original tendency was to cluster together rather than disperse. The most probable primary form of rural settlement would be an agglomerated one (Demangion, 1962). It is argued that grouping would be the first effort of man and the ancient familial organisation would be the framework of the first village communities. The transformation of these grouped settlements into dispersed settlements coincide with agricultural progress (ibid.)

V.K.J. Menon (1954) who identified both dispersed and nucleated settlements in different parts of Kerala (the dominant being the former) has illustrated at length how the specific geographic features conditioned particular settlement types. In

the coastal region and the laterite plateaus where water is abundant and no co-operative effort is needed for cultivation we find dispersed settlements. Nucleated settlements are confined to the more difficult region of the gaps, the foot hills of main ghats and the high land region, where there is a dearth water or unfavourable conditions for economic development. Joan P. Mechner (1966) also seems to support this hypothesis. Sourirajan (1932) argued that the Tharavadu which was the main household system in Kerala, resembled the separate farm houses in Assam (4). He suggested that it could be in areas where there is a threat of frequent floods, people live in such isolated homesteads. Dann (1932) pointed out that excessive rainfall itself could be a reason for the open compound since it ensures a more rapid disposal of water. If houses are closely built there would be a danger of inundation in the streets as most of the water will be discharged immediately from the houses and yards into the street.

One must be skeptical of projecting hydrologic conditions as the single explanatory variable for the emergence of particular settlement patterns. Examples of settlement types where one cannot establish any strong correlation between hydrologic conditions and population distribution are cited by Demangion (1962) (5). In fact a more plausible hypothesis in the case of Kerala would be to relate the evolution of this unique settlement pattern with the organisation of property conditioned by Brahmin colonisation. Generally, from a geographic stand point the stages of social and economic evolution are the following; (i) Food gathering stage, (ii) the stage of specialised collectors (iii) the stage of clan peasantry (iv) the



stage of feudally or autocratically organised agrarian societies (v) the stage of early urbanism and rent capitalism and (vi) the stage of modern capitalism (Bobek, 1962). It seems that the stage of autocratically organised agrarian system was forced on the indigeneous society by Brahmin colonisers (Rajan Gurukkal, 1987). This new organisation of production was characterised by a landed aristocracy at the apex, a crowd of small tenants at the middle and aggrestic slaves at the bottom. In the Baltic countries (Lavitha, Lithuania, Estomia) for example then large land owners preferred to divide their domains among a large number of tenants and adopted the system of dispersed settlement (Demangun, 1962). The unit of exploitation (as it happened in Kerala) was large enough to occupy and support a family. The houses of tenants were built seperately on such big lands. This process was completed before 11th and 12th centuries (Rajan Gurukkal, 1986). This would suggest that the settlement pattern in Kerala was determined both by its physical geography as well as socio-economic organisation.

The settlement pattern in turn had a tremendous impact on the process of urbanisation in Kerala. As we have noted there is a diffused spatial ordering of seperate homesteads amidst coconut orchads which resulted in a situation where the fixation of the village boundary becomes arbitrary. Coupled with this there is a very high population pressure. With respect to population density Kerala ranks first in India. Thus the average size of a Kerala village stands in sharp contrast to their counterparts elsewhere in India (See Table 5.5). These big villages, in themselves with high population dimension and density can for all practical purposes be considered as agricultural towns (6). But

since, the census definition gives emphasis to the non-

Table 5.5: Distribution of Villages by population size in Kerala and India, 1971

Size	India	Kerala
< 500	55.3	0.3
500 - 999	23.1	0.2
1000 -1999	14.2	1.3
2000 -4999	6.3	9.6
5000 -9999	0.9	24.9
10,000+	0.2	63.7
Total	100	100

Source: Census of India, 1971.

agricultural diversification of the occupational structure, these villages do not come under the category of urban. But when their economic structure change they slowly graduate to urban status. The new towns which emerged in the 1960's and 1970's are medium and small towns. In contrast to this, in Tamil Nadu of the 155 new towns that emerged in 1971 only twenty were medium towns (Sankaranarayanan, 1977). The rural economic structure on the other hand is characterised by a relative dominance of non-agricultural activities (See Table 5.6). 42 per cent of the total main workers in rural Kerala are

Table 5.6: Rural-Main workers classified by industrial categories 1981

Category	Number of workers	Percentage to workers
Cultivators	858236	15.31
Agricultural Labourers	1819505	32.46
Forestry	576358	10.28
Mining and Quarrying	50304	0.89
Household Industries	216226	3.86
Non household Industries	580254	10.35
Construction	145645	2.60
Trade and Commerce	513351	9.16
Transport and Communication	216257	3.86
Others	628909	11.22
Total main workers	5605055	100.00

Source: Census of India, 1981.

employed in non-primary activities. The instability which we observed in Kerala's modern urban system is partly due to this peculiarity of the economic structure. Generally it could be argued that the urban-rural economic continuum in terms of physical amenities of life and development of trading activities based on commercial agriculture changes the economic structure of the villages and they graduate to urban status. Historically, there is a fairly impressive spread of health and educational facilities in this region (7). Similarly the decay of traditional industries, rural to rural migration, inability of particular regions to absorb the increased population in non-agricultural activities etc. could result in a very high degree of declassification. There is also a fall in the fertility rates bringing down the natural increase in population (8). This is manifested by the slow rate of growth of towns in the absence of a strong rural to urban migration stream.

#### 5.4. Summary

Urbanisation in Kerala was an offshoot of the global process of capital accumulation. Colonialism conditioned itself to the ecological system and played a significant role in the transformation of the indigeneous spatial ordering in the state.

Many of the unique characteristics of Kerala's urban process such as the crowd of small towns along the coast, absence of a primate city, diversified functional structure of towns, better spatial dispersal of towns etc. could be attributed to the development processes which were forced by colonialism. At the same time, the role played by the ecology of the region cannot be underestimated. Especially in shaping the modern urban system, the peculiar settlement pattern plays a vitally significant role. The role of post colonial development process which is a continuation of earlier historical processes in its interplay with the ecology of the region must also taken into account.

## Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of this see Umadevi (1984), Varghese, T.C. (1972) etc.
2. Marx analysis of the question of space under capitalism is discussed in Harvy, D (1985).
3. See Thomas Isaac (1985) Pyarelal (1986) Kannan (1981) Rajagopalan (1986) etc.
4. It is the physical form and not the familiar organisation that is taken into account.
5. The humid lands of frequent rains in Western Europe is characterised by dispersed settlements. In a relatively homogeneous lime stone region in France, the Caux, we find dispersed settlements in the west and agglomerated settlements in the east. On the plateau of the Ardeanes, though there is a super abundance of springs, the inhabitants opted for compact, grouped villages. Another example is on the hungarian puzta where water is found in a shallow depth which can be reached by the most elementary wells as in the case of Kerala. Here people have formed nucleated settlements. Therefore geographers argue that the question of water in traditional societies plays only a secondary role.
6. In Russia, for example there are many agrogorodas meaning agricultural towns (See Valentey, 1978).
7. See for a discussion of these aspects Tharakan, M.P.K. (1984), P.G.K. Panikar and Soman (1986) etc.
8. For a discussion of the reasons for the fall in the fertility rates in Kerala, See P.G.K. Panikar (1984), P.R.G. Nair (1981) Leela Gulati (1976), Krishnan, T.N (1976) etc.

## Chapter VI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Urban process in the third world has been erroneously conceived as a precocious one. It is true that the experiences of urban evolution in the less opulent world are drastically different from the patterns observed in the industrialised world where urbanisation was essentially an offshoot of a sequential sectoral development of the economy from backward agriculture to industrial growth followed by the emanation of a well organised services network. In the third world on the other hand, the prospects of agrarian reformation and productivity rise are still gloomy compounded by a stagnating industrial sector. But the services sector shows a rapid development which accounts for the unprecedented agglomeration of the third world population in towns and cities. The causative factors for this "lopsided" development process are historical. To be precise, at the confluence of these impulses is colonialism. Indeed one has to locate the urban question in the third world within the problematic of the geography of capitalist accumulation. But many issues may become fraught and inconclusive if one fails to understand the nature of depended relations each geographical unit had held with the metropolis of the world capitalism. Region specific studies thus assume a prominent role in the field

of urban research. Our object of enquiry was the urban question in Kerala.

It is found that urban forms appeared in this region only during the post medieval period when the economy was integrated into the world system of modern capitalism. In the ancient as well as in the medieval period there are no circumstantial evidences to suggest an indogenous dynamics of urbanisation in Kerala. The peculiar history of the region characterised by the absence of a strong central political power structure and technological development is responsible for this. It was under the initiative of colonial capital that specific urban forms emerged in Kerala.

The modern urban process in Kerala also shows distinct differences when compared to other regions. The major differences that one could delineate are (i) the urban growth path seems to be less fluctuating, (ii) the degree of urbanisation is at a low level (iii) the spatial dispersion of towns is very high (iv) the towns normally grow at a very slow pace (v) the role played by migration in the urban dynamics appears to be insignificant and (vi) the proportion of the extensional and decremental components in the total urban growth is unduly high etc.

The modern urban system as it emerges in Kerala was articulated through a well developed transport net work. The system is characterised by the conspicuous absence of a central node which links all towns and contributes to a major share of urban population and urban economic activity. The role of big cities also appear to be less prominent. The economic base of the system is so structured that there is not much functional

specialisation in towns. Another major feature of the urban system is its instability manifested by the emergence and declassification of towns in each census.

The causative factors for this differential performance are many and varied. The investment of British capital in the economy was mainly in the plantations and various steps were deliberately adopted to increase the area under commercialised agriculture. This led to an enormous increase in trading and processing activities related to plantation products. The agro processing industries which developed in Kerala did not get concentrated in particular areas leading to a progressive agglomeration of productive forces and hence population. Instead there was a decentralisation of these traditional industries which cascaded down from higher forms of production organisation to household business. The ecology of the region also played a very significant role. The navigable water ways from the ghats to the coast which cut the mainland and the natural harbouring facilities all along the coast etc. are some among them. The settlement pattern which is of a dispersed type had its impact on the urban process in the colonial and post colonial periods. Dispersed settlement pattern resulted in the phenomenon of big villages the boundaries of which could be delineated only arbitrarily. This has also led to a situation by which any development process easily gets diffused into rural areas. The better spatial dispersion of towns is mainly due to the decentralisation of non agricultural activities and nature of settlement type leading to the development of urbanised fringes or commuter villages which could not be meaningfully regarded as either urban or rural in a spatial sense. Any distinction



between urban and rural cultural patterns is increasingly difficult to make. The low intra-state mobility of the population manifested by the migration streams is due to this peculiar economic situation.

The salient features of the urban system such as the absence of a primate city, diversified economic structure of the towns, instability etc. are also partly explained by the nature of development process. A primate central node did not develop in Kerala because of two reasons. For all administrative purposes, the region was regarded as a part of Madras presidency with Madras as its central node. Secondly, there was no progressive concentration of productive forces and population in any particular region of the state. Towns in Kerala emerged mainly as trading and processing centres. Household industries, trade and commerce, other service activities etc. became the feature of almost all towns. This means that there was no functional specialisation taking place in most of the towns. Instability in the system manifested by a higher share of extensional as well as decremental components of urbanisation is explained by the economic structure of the rural country side and the settlement pattern. The peculiarities which we observed in the development process compounded by the fact that the dimension and density of population in the Kerala villages are very high explains the instability. To be more precise, the big villages when their economic character becomes non-agricultural, graduate to urban status. In some areas on the other hand either due to rural to rural migration or due to the decay of traditional industries erstwhile urban units may get declassified. Another reason may be population growth coupled with an inability of the

region to absorb more of the labour force in non-agricultural activities.

The above observations bring to light the fact that the urban process in Kerala, the transformation of the relationship between society and space is rather unique. The statistical empiricism of the census definitions need not necessarily capture the dynamism involved in the process. One has to look for other meaningful measures and criteria for delineating urban centres in Kerala. Space is socially produced. It may take varied forms. Logan (1981) had remarked that towns and towns life are not congenial to the tastes and habits of Malayalees. The various historical process had ultimately created a situation where the emerging spatial form is neither rural nor urban. They can be either called 'rurban' or semi-urban. But it must be born in mind that it is under-development and depreviation rather than economic development which led to this unique spatial ordering.

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