

**URBANIZATION OF CALICUT AND THE ZAMORINS: A  
STUDY ON TRADE, POLITY AND CULTURE OF EARLY  
MODERN KERALA**

*The dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial  
fulfillment for the degree of the*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**TEENA KUNJUKUTTY**



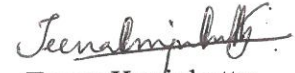
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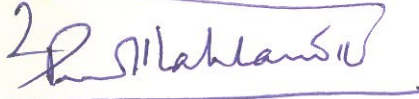
**DECLARATION**

I, Teena Kunjukutty, hereby declare that the Dissertation titled “Urbanization of Calicut and the Zamorins: A Study on Trade, Polity and Culture of Early Modern Kerala” submitted by me in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my original work. The Thesis/ Dissertation has not been previously submitted in part or in full for the award of any other degree of this university or any other university.

  
Teena Kunjukutty

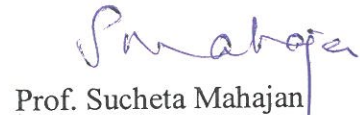
**CERTIFICATE**

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## INTRODUCTION

"The ocean, the father of the goddess of riches (Indira is a synonym of Lakshmi) seeing that his daughter has settled down in the city (Kukkatakroda, which is the Sanskritised form of Kozhikode<sup>1</sup>), is embracing the place, presenting it with shipfuls of jewels."<sup>2</sup>

(Uddanda the Sanskrit poet in the court of the Zamorins)<sup>3</sup>

Calicut has been a city immortalized in time with the aspect of it being the place where Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese commander arrived in 1498. While most have heard of Calicut only post the arrival of Gama, there has been much to this place even before his arrival. Calicut was a medieval city ruled by the Zamorins and was an important trading centre wherein traders came from far and wide to sell their merchandise. It features first in the writings of Ibn Battuta and later it makes an appearance in the writings of foreign travelers such as Abdur Razzak, Duarte Barbosa, Pyrard of Laval, etc. Calicut's fame in medieval times has remained obscure to many but she has been studied extensively by various history enthusiasts.

Philip Baldaeus introduces Calicut, "The second kingdom of Malabar is that of Calecut under the jurisdiction of the Sammoryn; it begins about three or four leagues to the south of Bergera (Vadakara) and ends at the River Cranganor; its whole extent being in length 32 leagues and 20 in breadth. This king is the most potent of all the Malabar kings, having a considerable number of *nairos* under his jurisdiction, who are very expert in both in handling the bow and fire-arms. He has made considerable encroachments upon his neighbors of late years; the revenues of his new conquests amounting now to 3,00,000 *fanams* yearly."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Calicut is the anglicized name of Kozhikode. Both the names will be used interchangeably in the following pages.

<sup>2</sup> M G S Narayanan, *Calicut: The City of Truth Revisited*, University of Calicut, Calicut: 2006, p. 21

<sup>3</sup> He is the author of the work called *Kokilasandesam*.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Baldaeus, *A True and Exact Description of the Most Celebrated East Indian Coasts of Malabar and Coromandel*, Amsterdam, 1672, p. 625.

Calicut was an obscure strip of land along the sea which the last Perumal gifted to one of his governors, the Polathiris and was later captured by the Zamorin. The contribution of the Zamorin to the development of Calicut is unprecedented. It was his presence and his initiative to utilize the available resources and even add to it with the creation of policies and a suitable environment for trade that worked in the benefit of Calicut. The Zamorin as a ruler did not engage in trade but we see that he strongly supported it.

There have been many cities in medieval India and it is an interesting aspect to look at how they got urbanized over years. While looking at the processes of urbanization in various parts of India, we understand that the reasons for each were not similar always. While some places got transformed into an urban enclave due to the presence of king and his retinue, some others gained an urban character due to trade and some due to the presence of pilgrimage centers, and some others because of having a port in the vicinity etc. While there have been many reasons for a town or a village transforming into a city, one thing we realize is that it was not something that happened overnight. These obscure places were transformed little by little and it was not solely their strength but an inter dependence on areas nearby including the resourceful hinterland and other commercially stimulated enclaves that led them to gain an urban nature. The presence of rulers and institutions acted as a stimulus for inflow of people, artisans /craftsmen and for creation of demand for goods etc., which oiled the wheels for the market activities and eventually led to the intensified exchange of people and goods and ideas and cultures, rendering an urban character to the place in question.

As the title suggests this is a study on the urbanization process in the city of Calicut under the Zamorins with a focus on the relationship between the individuals and society and between markets and the state. The study also aims to look into the economic, political and cultural motors of urbanity in Calicut, which in turn helped eventually to emit a set of dynamics and synergy that favoured the entry of early modernity in Kerala. The wealth accumulated by trade enabled the Zamorins to patronize in Calicut a large number of artisans, literary personalities and poets, who

undertook different pursuits of culture. The intensity of trade, power process and cultural production in Calicut accelerated the process of its urbanization. Though urbanization is defined as the "process by which large numbers of people become permanently concentrated in relatively small areas forming cities,"<sup>5</sup> it ultimately meant the social form or microcosm in which the essential properties of larger system of social relations were intensely concentrated, as Philip Abraham argues.<sup>6</sup> The Oxford dictionary simply puts it as 'the process to change a place into a town like area'. According to John Palan, "urbanization is the process by which an area becomes an urban centre. Urbanism points to the behavioural aspects of urban life, to the particular way of life in a city."<sup>7</sup> A city is differentiated from a town or village by the fact that it does not have agricultural sites. S Ghurye writes, "Cities have been units of settlements where population concentrate for non-subsistence activities like crafts, trade, administration and ritual functions."<sup>8</sup>

The process of urbanization is complex and it is not in a day that a place transforms itself into a town or city. MGS Narayanan writes, "Like ancient Rome, Calicut was also not built in a day. The construction of the harbour, the bazaars and the fort and palace complex, not to speak of the temples, mosques, warehouses, aristocratic houses and service quarters, must have taken several years or decades."<sup>9</sup> "Every instance of urbanization is unique in its own way and so it is meaningless to look for a universal model. Urbanization is a complex process with ecological, economic, social, political and psychological bearings."<sup>10</sup> Thus the study of urbanization of a region involves the study of a variety of aspects that contributed to its development. A number of factors are instrumental in transforming a region to imbibe urban characteristics. Urbanization is a time-consuming process and we can never say a region has become a city entirely. A city keeps evolving with the times

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/urbanization>

<sup>6</sup> Philip Abraham, as quoted by Pius Malekandathil, 'Theoretical Meanings and Conceptualizations of Medieval Towns', in Yogesh Sharma and Pius Malekandathil (ed.), *Cities in Medieval India*, New Delhi: Primus Books, 2014, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> John J Palan, *The Urban World*, New York, 1975, pp. 5-6.

<sup>8</sup> S Ghurye, *Cities and Civilization*, Bombay, 1962, p. 189.

<sup>9</sup> M G S Narayanan, *Calicut: The City of Truth Revisited*, p. 63.

<sup>10</sup> Vijayalekshmy M, *Trade and Trading Centres in Kerala: AD 800-1500*, PhD Thesis submitted to Department of History, Calicut University, December 1997, pp. 13-14.

and urbanity takes new meanings with changing circumstances. It is the duty of the historian to carefully study the evolution process and this can be done holistically only by undertaking the study with an aim to understand the role different aspects played, in contributing to urbanity rather than trying to find a singular reason.

“Urban History is the study of urbanization, of the expansion of urban centres in the span of time, the factors which promote and retard such growth, and the ecology which towns generate in several related dimensions: in the natural environment, in the economic system, in political apparatus, in societal network, and even in the minds of men living in towns.”<sup>11</sup>

Calicut is an example of a port city as it is the presence of a port that led to its rising to prominence. However, "a port city is more than a city located at a port. As an urban settlement it has specific characteristics derived from its maritime functions of exchange, enterprise and transport."<sup>12</sup> "The prime function of the ports was to act as ambassadors of their hinterlands to the outside world."<sup>13</sup>

Calicut despite being a famous medieval city has not received enough stature as other medieval towns like Delhi or Surat. While there are mentions of Calicut in the travel records, Calicut has been comparatively less studied by scholars. The paucity of sources and lack of knowledge of medieval Malayalam scripts can be accounted as one reason. The Zamorin was famous throughout as a benevolent and just king and his port was considered the safest haven for traders in medieval times. Yet there is a lack of extensive studies on this port town. Another reason may be that, Calicut may not have come up to the set standards of what a city should be, in the views of the historians who study the urbanization processes. This aspect can be seen in the light of the writings of foreign travelers for whom the cities of the Mughals did not come up to the standards of European cities.<sup>14</sup> Narayani Gupta writes, “Stereotypes of

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<sup>11</sup> Indu Banga, (ed.) *The City in Indian History*, Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1994, p.1.

<sup>12</sup> Atiya H Kidwai, ‘Conceptual and Methodological Issues: Port, Cities and Port Hinterland’, in *Ports and Their Hinterlands in India (1700-1950)*, Delhi, 1992, pp25-26.

<sup>13</sup> James Bird cited by Vijayalekshmy M, M, *Trade and Trading Centres in Kerala: AD 800-1500*, p.10.

<sup>14</sup> Nicolas Withington observed, ‘This Agra is no cittye but a towne; yet the biggest I ever saw’. The nature and quality of urbanization prevented Agra from being classified as a city despite its large

oriental/western towns, pre-industrial/modern towns should be put aside, and more attention given to regional patterns and to indigenous perceptions”<sup>15</sup>

Hence, I attempt to pose the following questions while studying the urbanization process in Calicut: What are the factors that led to the development of Calicut as a city? How was it transformed to imbibe city like traits? Can its urbanization process be deemed unique in any way? How far did the nuanced dynamics stemming from hectic trade, intense power process and cultural production contribute to the urban-uniqueness of Calicut? What were the urban characteristics it acquired? Who all played the prime role in the development of this urban settlement? What role did the Zamorin play in bringing together the producers and the traders? To what extent Calicut played the role of a centre wherein the products from the hinterlands merged to cater to the demands?

### **0.1 Situating the Historiography:**

The history of Calicut is intrinsically embedded in the history of both Malabar and Indian Ocean history. The existing historiography traditions focus on the rise of Calicut in the fourteenth century, highlights its diminishing status in trade with the arrival of the Portuguese, and finally marks the decline by the time of Dutch conquest of the Portuguese forts in Malabar. Even though various scholars disagree on several points, the general trajectory is mostly well-maintained in all the efforts at this historiography.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, in several other works, Calicut is portrayed as a native kingdom that fights with the “colonial powers” and advocates the idea of free trade. Calicut is portrayed as a kingdom that resisted European penetration into India and this anti-European kingdom is said to have declined due to the unjust acts of the European powers like the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English. Most of the

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dimensions...”- p.3 ”Tavernier described Gwalior as a large town ill built in the manner of India.”- p.42 -Yogesh Sharma, ‘The City in Medieval India’ in *Cities in Medieval India*.

<sup>15</sup> Narayani Gupta, ‘Urbanism in South India’ in Indu Banga (ed.) *The City in Indian History*, p. 121

<sup>16</sup>A. Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, Kottayam: DC Books, 2008; M N Pearson, *The New Cambridge History of India, The Portuguese in India*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008; Stephen Dale, *Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier: The Mappilas of Malabar*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1980, and so many other writings.

historiography perceives Calicut as a typical medieval city of free trade and commerce and victim of European commercial violence and surveillance in the Indian Ocean.

Many authors who have contributed to writing a comprehensive history of Kerala mention the Zamorin as the superior political authority in Kerala and his rule in Calicut as a trader-friendly political exercise. These works include that of K. P. Padmanabha Menon's *History of Kerala*<sup>17</sup>, Sreedhara Menon's *A Survey of Kerala History*<sup>18</sup> etc., who as part of their study on the larger story of Kerala, analyzes the history of Calicut and the Zamorins as symbols of resistance to European hegemony. However they have nothing new to offer in terms of historical knowledge but only act as providers of information regarding the Zamorins and their rule.

Several other books such as *The Kunjali Admirals of Calicut* by O K Nambiar<sup>19</sup>, *Malabar in Asian Trade* by Ashin Das Gupta<sup>20</sup>, *Regent of the Sea* by Genevieve Bouchon,<sup>21</sup> *The Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore: History and State Formation in Travancore* by Mark de Lannoy<sup>22</sup> etc., look into the political history of Calicut in a passing way, without analyzing the processes of its urbanization.

Extensive but relatively few studies have also been conducted on Calicut. Some of them are: *The Zamorins of Calicut* by K V Krishna Ayyar has been one of the most comprehensive political history on Calicut compiled till date. It has been written by corroborating the documents of the *Kozhikodan Granthavari* with the accounts of foreign travelers and contains copious volumes of information. The book is an excellent read for those who would like to gain an in depth knowledge of the Zamorins, beginning with their origin till their eventual decline. One can understand the various rituals connected with coronation, *Mamankam*-celebration, and also

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<sup>17</sup> K P Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, IV volumes, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1982-86.

<sup>18</sup> Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, Kottayam: DC Books, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> O. K. Nambiar, *The Kunjali Admirals of Calicut*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963.

<sup>20</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967.

<sup>21</sup> Genevieve Bouchon, *Regent of the Sea, : Cannanore's Response to Portuguese Expansion, 1507-1528*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988.

<sup>22</sup> Mark de Lannoy, *The Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore: History and State Formation in Travancore from 1651 to 1758*, Leiden: Leiden University, 1997.

different rituals connected with life-cycles. According to Ayyar, “Calicut owes its development as a port to the arrival and settlement of Arabs who made it the greatest port in the West Coast of India and helped to spread the name and fame of the Zamorin in Europe.”<sup>23</sup> The other reasons that he attributes for the rise of Calicut are: it being the capital of an expanding empire, had the command over the waterways that gave access to the pepper country and was the trusted port of the Muslim traders.<sup>24</sup> However he attributes the rise of Calicut to the policy of the Zamorin which induced many to flock to the port in large numbers.<sup>25</sup> The truthfulness, security and religious freedom offered by him were the reasons for Calicut to become a meeting place for traders from different nations and religious backgrounds. While Ayyar gives us a detailed report of the reign of the Zamorins, he does not talk anything of the gaining of an urban nature by Calicut. He mainly talks of it as a famous medieval port and describes at length the relations which the Zamorins had with the neighbouring kingdoms, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English. It basically talks about the political aspects of the history of the Zamorins.

Another monumental work that has come forth in the late 1980’s is that of N. M. Namboothiri. His book *Samootiri Charitratile Kanaappurangal*<sup>26</sup> (1987) has contributed to reduce the paucity of sources related to the Zamorins as he has consulted the *Granthavaris* and procured information. The *Granthavaris* had been lost for quite some decades after Ayyar used them for his work. In the book his focus is based more on the study of the origin of place names (onomastics)<sup>27</sup> based on the documents in the *Granthavari*. He offers a different perspective to the cultural understandings of medieval Calicut and whole Malabar for that matter. He sheds light on the developments of socio-cultural layers and relations regarding the names of places and hierarchies. A detailed study on the names of nobles and co-sharers of power, who used to accompany Zamorin during the days of *Mamankam* was done by

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<sup>23</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, Calicut: The Zamorins College Cooperative Stores Ltd, 1938, pp. 16 and 52.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83, 84.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>26</sup> N M Namboothiri, *Samootiri Charitratile Kanaappurangal*, Sukapuram: Vallathol Vidyapeedham, 1987.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

N. M. Namboothri in another work of considerable significance.<sup>28</sup> To this category one may also add, K Balakrishna Kurup's work entitled *Kozhikodinte Charithram*.<sup>29</sup>

M G S Narayanan has also worked extensively on the city of Calicut and its rulers the Zamorins. *Kozhikodinte Katha*<sup>30</sup>, *Kerala Charitrathinte Adisthaana Silakal*<sup>31</sup>, *Kozhikodinte Charithram: Mythkalum Yatharthyangalum* and *Calicut: The City of Truth Revisited*<sup>32</sup> are comprehensive works which deal extensively with the history of Calicut. The general history of Calicut over years has been unraveled in these works, without resorting to in depth analysis of either its economic process or its urban process. *The Perumals of Kerala* and *Political and Social Conditions of Kerala under the Kulasekhara Perumal* by M G S Narayanan,<sup>33</sup> though do not speak anything about Calicut, provide a background information regarding the polity and economy under the Perumals who were the rulers of Kerala before its division into *swarupams*.

K S Mathew's article 'Calicut, the International Emporium of Maritime Trade and the Portuguese during the Sixteenth Century'<sup>34</sup> also traces the development of Calicut until its demise in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He highlights the fact that it was a famous port even before the arrival of Vasco da Gama. Mathew<sup>35</sup> and Pius Malekandathil<sup>36</sup> have studied the history of Malabar with the help of Portuguese

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<sup>28</sup> N. M. Namboothiri, *Malabar Padanangal: Samoothirinadu*, Trivandrum: State Institute of Languages, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> K Balakrishna Kurup, *Kozhikodinte Charithram* (11 edition.), Calicut, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> M G S Narayanan, *Kozhikodinte Katha*, Ottapalam: Chettur Sankaran Nayar Foundation, 2001.

<sup>31</sup> M G S Narayanan, *Kerala Charitrathinte Adisthaana Silakal*, Calicut: Navsahiti, 1972.

<sup>32</sup> M. G. S. Narayanan, *Calicut: The City of the Truth Revisited*, Calicut, 2006.

<sup>33</sup> M. G. S. Narayanan, *Political and Social Conditions of Kerala under the Kulasekhara Perumal*, Kottayam, 1972.

<sup>34</sup> K. S. Mathew, "Calicut, the international emporium of maritime trade and the Portuguese during the sixteenth century" in *O Estado da India e Os Desafios Europeus*, Edited by Jao Paulo Oliveria e Costa, Lisboa, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> K. S. Mathew, "The Portuguese Trade on the Malabar Coast during the Early Sixteenth Century (1500-1530)." PhD Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1978; K.S.Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*. New Delhi: Manohar Books, 1983; K. S. Mathew (ed.), *Maritime Malabar and the Europeans*. K S Mathew. Haryana: Hope India Publication, 2003.

<sup>36</sup> Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India , 1500-1663*, New Delhi, 2001; Pius Malekandathil , *Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Polity in the Indian Ocean* , New Delhi, 2010.



sources thus opening up a wider arena of information on trade, religion, polity and culture.

V V Haridas's book, '*Zamorins and the Political Culture of Medieval Kerala*' is the latest work in the field. Through the work he attempts to study the nature of the state under the Zamorin with reference to the "royal functionaries who acted in various capacities in the vast network of the government machinery."<sup>37</sup> He argues that studies on the history of the state in Kerala has been limited to the Chera period and that this study on the Zamorins will "shed light on the way in which a medieval state functioned in South India in the post Chera period."<sup>38</sup> He also suggests the usage of the term 'little kingdom' used by Nicholas Dirks to study the kingdom of Kozhikode. In his study, he takes Kozhikode as the kingdom and Calicut as one of its ports, unlike other studies where both Kozhikode and Calicut are used in reference to Calicut. The main focus of Haridas has been to study the use of cultural aspects by the Zamorin in order to maintain his political hegemony. His study talks in detail about the royal functionaries, the importance of the festivals of *Mamankam* and *Taipuyam* and their role in "helping the little kingdom look larger than it actually was and secured for it a power and influence which it did not otherwise possess."<sup>39</sup> Since the focus of his study is based on Kozhikode as a kingdom and Calicut as a port, the aspect of urbanization is not dealt with. His focus has been to highlight the 'little kingdom' aspect of Kozhikode and show how the Zamorin maintained his kingdom with the help of rituals and symbols.

Most of the above mentioned documents focus on the aspects of society, trade, and political relations with neighbouring kingdoms etc. The political history of Calicut has been vastly dealt with and so have been some of the cultural aspects with the recent work of V V Haridas. Trade in terms of the commodities imported and exported and the trade routes involved has also been only casually discussed in most of these works. However how Calicut evolved as a city because of the nuanced

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<sup>37</sup> V V Haridas, '*Zamorins and the Political Culture of Medieval India*, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2016, p. xvi.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. xvi.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 318.

dynamics stemming from its pursuits of trade, polity and culture is less studied. While individual aspects such as society, economy, polity and culture have been studied in differing degrees in antecedent works, there have been fewer studies on the interdependence of all these in the making of Calicut as a famous medieval port city. I would like to depart from the model of study that V V Haridas has undertaken for studying Kozhikode through the lens of a “little kingdom”. I would like to look at Calicut as a port town that developed into a city and whose urbanization process was not limited but changed and constantly modified and re-modified on the basis of changing socio-economic and cultural milieu.

My inspiration for working on the urbanization of Calicut has been two articles written by Pius Malekandathil namely, ‘Rubrics of Power and Trade in Calicut’<sup>40</sup> and ‘Societal Process and a Mercantile City’<sup>41</sup> which deal with different aspects of urbanization of Calicut. The first article briefly talks about the aspect of how the Zamorin by wielding influence over three different types of resourceful geographies facilitated the growth of trade and helped to evolve market mechanisms, all contributing to the growth of Calicut as a world renowned port. He shows how the chain of recurring ritual celebrations in *kavus* patronized by Zamorin helped to mobilize resources in the hinterland, which were made to move to markets of varying degrees through the seasonal festivities at the *kavus* and later to Tirunavaye, where the *Mamankam* used to happen once in twelve years. In their preparatory processes for ritual celebrations, spices and other commodities were made to flow to these converging points of ritual importance, from where they were taken to Ponnani, the secondary capital of the Zamorins and finally to Calicut for international trade. The second article looks into the urbanization process of the mercantile city of Calicut and shows how the Zamorin utilized his relations with the different sections of the society to maintain the mercantile nature of the city and to resist the Europeans and delay the process of colonization in this region for long. However, these articles offer only a synoptic view of the nuances embedded in the urbanization process of Calicut. There

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<sup>40</sup> Pius Malekandathil, ‘Rubrics of Power and Trade in Calicut’, in G. Archa, *Calicut and Cosmopolitanism*, (Cafe Dissensus), February, 2016.

<sup>41</sup> Pius Malekandathil, ‘Societal Process and a Mercantile City’, A paper presented in the National Seminar on *Cities in Medieval India*, JNIAS, New Delhi, March 7-8, 2008.

is an evident lacuna in the existing historiography as far as the studies on the urban past of Calicut are concerned. No studies have so far looked into the nuanced process of urbanization of Calicut or into the role that trade, polity and culture played in giving a specific urban identity to it. Hence I have taken *Urbanization of Calicut and the Zamorins: A Study on Trade, Polity and Culture of Early Modern Kerala* as the topic for my M.Phil thesis.

## **0.2 Chapterisation**

I would like to divide my study into three chapters, besides an introduction and a conclusion. In the introductory chapter attempts will be made to look into the objectives and problems of research, besides outlining the design of study. This chapter also analyzes the nature of different historiographical traditions that had so far evolved around this theme and establishes the relevance of the work.

The first chapter, being the background chapter, proposes to look into the way how Calicut rose from a small obscure strip of land to a world-renowned port. The geographical location of Calicut, its connectivity with the pepper-producing hinterland, the river-routes and the land-routes through which commodities were taken to Calicut will also be discussed in this chapter. The circumstances and the contextual details regarding the transfer of royal quarters of the chief of Nediyiruppu *swarupam* from Eranadu to Calicut after having defeated the Polathiris will also be discussed. The increasing maritime trade in the Indian Ocean in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries made the chief of Nediyiruppu *swarupam* to carve out more and more pepper-producing geographies by conquering the best pepper-yielding principalities in the neighbourhood for the sake of ensuring regular supply of cargo for maritime trade. This chapter will also highlight the rapport that the Zamorin developed with the various Muslim mercantile segments for carrying out his political and commercial endeavours. Trade could not be made possible by staying isolated and hence this chapter will also look at the dependency on liminal geographies for commodities and as to show how Calicut became a central point for the convergence

of various trade routes from the hinterland. This chapter will focus on the nature of trading activities up to the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and will also highlight the changes that happened in the trade of Calicut while resisting the Portuguese monopoly trade in the Indian Ocean. We need to look at the changes which were wrought about in Calicut prior to the arrival of the Portuguese as it was famous trade centre already and also highlight the type of transformation that happened in its trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Calicut's free trading rights were challenged by the Portuguese and other European powers. Did their arrival and monopolistic trade disrupt the urbanization process of Calicut? What were the changes that they brought about in the trading scenario? How did the Zamorin and his mercantile collaborators respond to the European trade? We read that it was not a peaceful meeting but one drawn out with many confrontations as the Europeans wanted to monopolize trade instead of co-existing with the other traders. How did the city cope to these changes? Were any new characteristics added to the urban character of Calicut in the wake of these changes?

The second chapter dwells upon the aspects of polity and cultural production in Calicut. Zamorin enhanced his power and political authority not only through conquest alone. Obviously the annexation of neighbouring principalities facilitated Zamorin to get access to rich pepper-producing hinterland as to ensure regular supply of cargo for Calicut's trade. The right to preside over the cultural-cum-ritual festival of *Mamankam*, which the Zamorin appropriated from Valluvanadu rulers after having occupied their territories, gave a pan-Kerala level political leadership to the Zamorin. The augmented political status of Zamorin was eventually translated into the urban space of Calicut, particularly in the urban segment where the royal quarters stood. The political subordination that the Zamorin realized through a chain of military conquests was followed by their periodical renewal of subordination and dependency through the rituals of *Mamankam*, in which all the political subordinates and allies participated hierarchy-wise acknowledging the primordial political position of the Zamorin.

This chapter also looks into the aspects of cultural production in Calicut. The Zamorin by name Manavikrama Varma (1466-1471) patronized eighteen distinguished scholars and poets (often known as *Patinettara kavikal*) in Calicut, whose activities made the city to evolve as an intellectual and cultural centre, as well. Uddanda Sastrikal, Bhattathiri of Kasserri, the two Payyur Bhattatiris Maharishi and Damodara Bhattatiri and Narayanan Nambudiri of Channas were noted among them.

Uddanda Sastrikal wrote the poem *Kokilasandesam* in Sanskrit and *Mallikamruta Mimamsa* was written by the Payyur Bhattatiris, while Kakkasseri Bhattatiri wrote the *Vasumati Manavikrama*, which is a Sanskrit drama that speaks of the marriage of Manavikrama with Vasumati, the daughter of Mangat Achan. Both Uddanda Sastrikal and Kakkasseri Bhattathiri were bestowed with the title of *Pattathanam*. *Kokilasandesam* of Uddanda Sastrikal belongs to the *Manipravala* (*mani* = ‘ruby’ and *pravala* = ‘outpouring, meaning ‘literary outpouring’) genre of Malayalam literature, which is a combination of Malayalam and Sanskrit, otherwise called *grantha*. *Chandrotsavam*, *Unnunili Sandesam*, *Unnichirutevicharitam*, *Unniyachicharitam*, *Unnichirutevicharitam* and Damodara Chakiyar’s *Siva Vilasam* etc., belong to the *Manipravalam* genre of literary pursuits. The Zamorin, who patronized the poets and this genre of literary tradition, manifested not only his wealth and ability to patronize but also asserted his superiority in cultural domains, which through his repeated exercises of patronages to poets and intellectuals was translated into augmented political superiority. The dissemination of literate culture, necessitated by the increasing requirements of trade and trade-related activities, was followed by dissemination of the practice of literary production in the length and breadth of the kingdom of Calicut and this made the terrains of the Zamorin to become the heartland of various cultural pursuits in Kerala. Thunchathu Ezhuthachan (1495-1575), who is called the father modern Malayalam, lived on the banks of Bharatapuzha in the kingdom of Calicut and wrote *Adyatma Ramayanam*, *Mahabharatham* and *Harinama Kirtanam*. The couplets from his works facilitated the fast entry of the waves of Vaishnava Bhakti movement, particularly the traditions of Rama cult, in the upland parts of Calicut and other upland parts of Kerala. Meanwhile Poonthanam Numbutiri (1547–1640AD), who lived in Guruvayoor, authored a number of Malayalam works,

including *Jnanappana*, *Srikrishna Karnamritam* and *Santagopalan*, mostly works that propagated Krishna cult. Melpattu Narayana Bhattatiri (1560–1646) wrote *Narayaneeyam* which deals with the major incidents in the *Bagavatapuranam*. Even the Zamorin Manaveda (A.D 1655-1658) wrote *Krishnagiti*, in tune with the popular practice of producing literary works for the consumption of devotees of Vaishnavism, fast spreading in the spice-producing upland regions of Kerala. At a time when Bhakti movement, particularly Vaishnavism, was fast spreading into the spice producing upland regions of Kerala, these devotional works eulogized not only Vishnu, the prime god, but also the Zamorin, the patron, whose wealth and power created sufficient conditions and atmosphere for that to happen. In that sense, patronage extended by the Zamorins turned out to be a mechanism that bolstered their political superiority and power position.

In the third chapter attempts are made to see the meanings of urbanity in Calicut. The Zamorin developed a 3-tier system of urban formulations by exercising his dominance in three different areas which eventually culminated at Calicut and helped in its development. These areas were Tirunavaye at the base level in the country-side, where *Mamankam* celebrations and its requirement for cultural productions created a set of nodal points with quasi-urban features, followed by Ponnani, which because of being located at the mouth of river Bharatapuzha, through which cargo flowed from the spice-hinterland, emerged as the secondary city and capital for the Zamorins and finally Calicut at the apex, where the seat of Zamorin's power and mercantile towns were located. Calicut was the primary capital, housing both the royal town and mercantile town separately. Ponnani was the secondary capital as the Zamorin had another residence here and also dubbed as the war town of the Zamorin as the major segment of his military force resided here. Tirunavaye on the other hand had a different role. It was here that the 12 yearly *Mamankam* festival was held under the patronage of the Zamorin. Here too the Zamorin had his residence. While most of his time was spent in Calicut and Ponnani, Tirunavaye gained a ritual significance due to the *Mamankam* celebrations. The latter as its proceedings reflect,

was a cultural institution through which the Zamorin asserted his authority and maintained it.

This unique aspect of having a 3-tiered system of dominance, supported by a three-tiered urban system was the core aspect of the mechanisms that Zamorin developed to mobilize resources from hinterland and link it with the international trade. By exercising authority over three different areas the Zamorin worked effectively in harnessing the resources and the social capital found here. These areas were well connected by riverine networks and commodities produced were transported effectively due to them. While Calicut was connected to the rich pepper producing hinterlands by the Chaliyar and Kallayi rivers, the rich agrarian belt on the banks of the river Bharatapuzha were also accounted for, by the 12 yearly *Mamankam* festival and the generous patronage of the sacred shrines (*kavus*) of non-Brahmins by the Zamorin. Ponnani was where the Marakkar traders who formed an important defense against the Portuguese lived and by having a residence there, the Zamorin not only exercised his dominance but also formed amicable relations with them to engage their valuable services. Ponnani also contributed to trade as its location was in the vicinity of the pepper producing areas on the Bharatapuzha. In Calicut, allowing the mercantile town to develop a cosmopolitan and secular outlook ensured the Zamorin the support and loyalty of the traders and other inhabitants in this area. I would like to see whether Ponnani and Tirunavaye also imbibed urban characteristics due to their relations with Calicut.

Finally, I would also study the role of the king and his officials in the making of the city as to show how through various activities and rituals they created a demand for variety of products and an entirely different type of spatial process in Calicut, particularly in that segment known as the royal quarters. The presence of the king and his retinue generated the need for commodities required by them in the royal quarters of the city of Calicut. Adjacent to the palace of the king stood the *Tali* temple, dedicated to Siva. In the premises of this temple was held the literary assembly known as as *Revathi Pattathanam*, which is also known as *Taliye Pattathanam* and *Tadbhava Pattathanam*. It was held on the day of *Revatiasterism* in

the month of *Thulam* (October – November). Often the money received by way of trade was spent on grand rituals and processions wherein the king was portrayed in a larger than life image, thus creating an awe and respect for the king. It was this image of the Zamorin that made many to pledge their allegiance and support him. The *Granthavari* records maintain the day to day dealings of the Zamorins and this can be utilized to study the role of the king in maintaining relations with different sections of urban society and how this helped in the making of a city. In this chapter the urbanization process of the mercantile segment of the Calicut located almost two and a half kilometres away from royal quarters and situated near the sea will also be looked into. The attempts will be to understand the nuances of spatial processes and the degree of dependency of Calicut on various segments of geographies, particularly the liminal geographies and people in the surrounding areas in various capacities for its rise as a world-famous port city in medieval times.

The major findings of the research are summarized in conclusion.

### **0.3. Methodology and Sources**

#### Methodology

The method involved in this study has been purely qualitative as it involves collection of various primary and secondary sources from libraries such as C H Mohammad Koya Library (University of Calicut), History Department Library of Calicut University, B R Ambedkar Central Library of JNU, Central Library of Delhi University, CHS Library of JNU and Sahtya Akademi Library, New Delhi. A wide array of primary sources on Calicut is available in Portuguese, Chinese, Persian and European languages. For these I have turned to English translations. The primary and secondary sources have been read extensively and the information gathered has been corroborated before making it a part of this study.



## Sources

One of the most important sources is the palm leaf manuscripts contained in a collection named the Kozhikode Granthavari. Some of these manuscripts have been collected and published in two volumes under the titles *Sthanarohanam Chatangukal*<sup>42</sup> and *Mamankam Rekhakal*.<sup>43</sup> These contain details about the rituals of ascension to the throne and about the *Mamankam* festival conducted once in 12 years. These both were important events in the kingdom of the Zamorin and hence a lot of details can be gauged from these documents. The manuscripts give the reader a glimpse into the daily expenditure of the Zamorin and also include names of the various beneficiaries and of those employed by the Zamorin for carrying out different types of tasks on such occasions. If read carefully these manuscripts are a mine of information for those who want to study the daily activities of the *Nediyirupu Swarupam* and one can draw inferences to show how these helped in consolidating power and authority of Zamorin. The names of the different beneficiaries indicate the different kinds of people the Zamorin depended on for the smooth functioning of his kingdom. It gives us an insight into how the Zamorin through various rituals stimulated the need for market activities which in turn ensured him the support of various groups of people scattered all over his kingdom. These activities helped the Zamorin to harness a social capital for himself.<sup>44</sup>

Several Portuguese documents throw great light onto the political activities and daily life of the Zamorin. We have a variety of them in the form of manuscripts and published works.

Sources in English too provide us with an idea of the political and economic activities of the Zamorin. One of the important one is William Logan's *A Collection*

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<sup>42</sup> M R Raghava Varrier (ed.), *Sthanarohana Chatangukal*, Sukapuram: Vallathol Vidyapeetham, 2004.

<sup>43</sup> N M Namboothiri (ed.), *Mamankam Rekhakal*, Sukapuram: Vallathol Vidyapeetham, 2005.

<sup>44</sup> "Social capital is defined as, social groups; networks which foster cooperation among individuals, forming a resource, which members of such organizations or larger collectivities could draw upon for uses of different nature." – Pius Malekandathil, 'Societal Process and a Mercantile City: A Study on the Medieval Town of Calicut'.

*of Treaties, Engagements and other Papers of Importance*<sup>45</sup>. It contains details of treaties the Zamorin had with the various European powers. It throws light into the terms and conditions placed by the Zamorin and also reveals to a certain extent the authority wielded by him. In the treaty signed between the Zamorin and the Dutch Company, we see how they pledge to support each other in case their respective enemies attack them.

In order to supplement the information received from the palm leaf manuscripts, Portuguese and English sources, this study also makes use of the travel accounts of various travelers who visited Calicut and the nearby kingdoms. We have a plethora of travelers from different parts of the world visiting Calicut due to the wide range of trade networks that converged here. The accounts of these travelers give us an idea about the various commodities that were procured from Calicut and at times they even mention the names of the hinterlands and the places to where these commodities were dispatched.

#### **0.4 Important Terms**

Calicut has been famous as a port and hence before delving deeper into the process of its urbanization we need to look at several terms that need to be introduced.

“A port is defined as the place of contact where goods and people as well as cultures are transferred between land and maritime space. It is a knot where ocean and inland transport lines meet and intervene.”<sup>46</sup> Port and harbor are two different concepts as the former is an economic one while the latter is a physical one.<sup>47</sup> A harbor is defined as the sheltered area of deep water.<sup>48</sup> While it is possible that a good

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<sup>45</sup> William Logan, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and other Papers of Importance*, 1879. Reprint, New Delhi, 1992.

<sup>46</sup> Atiya Habeeb Kidwai, ‘Conceptual and Methodological Issues: Ports, Port Cities and Port Hinterlands’ in Indu Banga (ed.), *Ports and their Hinterlands in India 1700-1950*, p.10

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10

port might not be in possession of a favorable harbor, a site on the coast having a natural harbor may also not qualify as a favorable site for a port to develop.

“The latter is due to the fact that several factors have to be considered before a site can be considered as a port such as physical factors (local topography, drainage, soil/land stability, depth, temperature of waters and movement of waters within it), economic factors (presence of credit facilities, storage houses etc for the favorable exchange of goods), social factors (favorability with traders and peaceful environment provided by rulers for trade) etc.”<sup>49</sup>

Ports are not independent entities. A commercially viable port has one or more hinterlands on which it is dependent for the commodities that are produced exclusively in that area. “While some say that the port is the window to the sea, it may be more significant to say that the port is a window from the sea to the land.”<sup>50</sup> The port offers what the hinterland produces and also displays extensively intricate transport systems by procuring goods even from far fledged areas. Thus a port can have more than a single hinterland. Greater the extent of liminal geographies the port is connected to, greater the variety of commodities available to the traders. Theoretically a hinterland can be defined as representing “a superimposition of layers of commodity flows connected through the medium of transport facilities, market organization, shipping services and port facilities.”<sup>51</sup> An important point to note is that a certain inland area can function as a hinterland to several ports.<sup>52</sup>

Foreland is another concept that we need to get acquainted with. They are “land areas which lie on the seaward side of a port, beyond maritime space and which are connected with that port by means of ocean carriers.”<sup>53</sup> Hence a port cannot be studied without looking into the relationship it has with the areas that comprise its hinterland and foreland as they help us understand,

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<sup>49</sup> Atiya Habeeb Kidwai, ‘Conceptual and Methodological Issues: Ports, Port Cities and Port Hinterlands’, p.12

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.18

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.18

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.19

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.22

“the rise and fall of individual ports as well as relationship between ports. Hinterlands and forelands are a complex of political, extractive and market systems. They sometimes evolve gradually over time through trade linkages or are deliberately created through the expansion of transport networks or rates and road control.”<sup>54</sup>

The rise of Calicut cannot be studied without understanding the relationship it shared with its interior regions. The dependency is of primary importance as it was the need to provide commodities for the port at Calicut that drove the Zamorin to create policies and institutions that would help him forge relations with the hinterland. Hence we start our study with a look at the rise of the Zamorin and the mechanism by which he gained control over the territories that provided valuable commodities for trade in Calicut.

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<sup>54</sup> Atiya Habeeb Kidwai, ‘Conceptual and Methodological Issues: Ports, Port Cities and Port Hinterlands’, p.23

## CHAPTER I

### **Calicut: Trade Networks, Mercantile Collaborators and Response to European Powers**

Calicut was an important port in the Indian Ocean and it attracted traders and merchants from far and wide. It occupied a significant position from the thirteenth century onwards and hence it is important to locate the port on the map and also to identify its hinterland and surrounding areas before delving deeper into the reasons contributing to its urbanization. With the port as its focus, a city developed, in order to cater to the demands created by it, Thus, leading to a wide array of changes in the landscape and composition of an area once merely identified as a strip of land by the sea. It also served as the seat of power of the Zamorins, the rulers of Calicut or the kingdom of Kozhikode.

This chapter will identify the hinterlands of Calicut, the various commodities produced therein and the various routes of transport involved along with the nature of trade that passed through this port. It will also include the adaptations the port underwent, in relation to the trading activities and also the nature of environment changes with the arrival of the European powers. The chapter will also look at the evolution of the *Nediyiruppu swarupam* and their migration from the Ernad *taluk* to Calicut which contributed to the overall development of Calicut and eventually had far reaching effects on Kerala's polity and commerce as a whole.

## 1.1 Emergence of Calicut

Calicut was a significant medieval port on ‘the east west axis of the emporia trade connecting Malacca with Venice on the Adriatic’<sup>1</sup> and was the centre of bustling trade from the second half of the thirteenth century till the second half of the fifteenth century.<sup>2</sup> One of the early travelers who visited Calicut (in 1344) was Ibn Batuta and he writes, “...the city of Calicut, one of the chief harbours of the country of Malabar, where people from China, Sumatra, Ceylon, The Maldives Islands, Yemen and Fars come, and here gather merchants from all the quarters of the globe. And the harbour of Calicut is one of the largest in the world.”<sup>3</sup> Pyrard de Laval who visited in 1607 writes, “There is no place in all India where contentment is more universal than at Calicut, both on account of the fertility and beauty of the country and of the intercourse with the men of all religions who live there in free exercise of their own religion.”<sup>4</sup> Even if we feel as though the author has exaggerated a tad bit, we will see in the following pages, he was not completely wrong. Calicut was one of the favored harbours in medieval India.

Calicut did not suddenly arise as a port of great significance. Quilon was the well-known port for the Chinese traders before the emergence of Calicut. Chinese junks and Arab *dhow*s sailed to Quilon from Chinese and Persian shores.<sup>5</sup> The fall of the Abbasid Caliphate in 1258 led to a major shift in trade routes. The trade through the Persian Gulf lost its importance and in the wake of this, the Mamluk Sultans of Egypt assumed control leading to the rise of the Karimi merchants who began to sail to Calicut.<sup>6</sup> There existed a port hierarchy by which among various ports along a coast

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<sup>1</sup> K S Mathew. ‘Calicut, The International Emporium of Maritime Trade and The Portuguese During The Sixteenth Century’, p.281

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.282

<sup>3</sup> Mahdi Hussain, *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta*, Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1976 p.188

<sup>4</sup> Albert Gray (ed.), *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, vol I, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2000, p.366

<sup>5</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800*, p.5

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.5

line, one would emerge and function as a central port for a definite period and others would function as satellite ports to this port.<sup>7</sup>

“Thus, the prime and pivotal position occupied, in the ancient period, by Muziris (Cranganore) was taken over by Quilon in the early medieval period which later during the period till sixteenth century was assumed by Calicut and with the advent of the Portuguese, this position was taken over by Cochin.”<sup>8</sup>

The kingdom of Calicut extended from Pudupattanam in the north to Parappanangadi in the south and included the ports of Tricodi, Pantalayani, Kappakkat, Calicut, Chaliyam, Ponnani and Chetwai.<sup>9</sup> Calicut was said to be bigger than Lisbon towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> Its position was that of an entrepot as commodities from far and wide were found here due to the convergence of various trade routes and hence it was compared to Bruges in Flanders and to Venice in Italy.<sup>11</sup>

The emergence of Calicut as a port city is attributed by many to the intensity of maritime trade that used to happen there. Tome Pires writes, “..but Calicut has grown in importance on account of the trade that is carried on there.”<sup>12</sup> But there are others who attribute it to political reasons with which this city was interlinked. K V Krishna Ayyar attributes the rise of Calicut to the Zamorins. He writes, “Originally a barren strip covered all over with thorny jungle, the genius of the Manavikramans converted

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<sup>7</sup> This phenomenon is explained by Atiya Habeeb Kidwai in Indu Banga (ed.), *Ports and Their Hinterlands in India*, p14

<sup>8</sup> Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India 1500-1663*, PhD Thesis submitted to Pondicherry University, 1998, p.48

<sup>9</sup> KS Mathew, ‘Calicut, The International Emporium of Maritime Trade and The Portuguese During The Sixteenth Century’, p.282

<sup>10</sup> K S Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*, p.23

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.23

<sup>12</sup> Armando Cortesao (ed.), *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2005, p.79

it into a mighty sea port..."<sup>13</sup> Before we proceed to understand the emergence of Calicut, it is important to know who the Zamorins were.

## 1.2 The Rise of the Zamorins

The Zamorins were the rulers of Calicut for more than five centuries up to the end of the eighteenth century. The Cheras were the last rulers who enjoyed a pan Kerala rulership and they reigned till the early twelfth century with Mahodayapuram as their capital.<sup>14</sup> After the partition of Kerala by the legendary Cheraman Perumal,<sup>15</sup> a new type of political institution developed in Kerala known as the '*swarupam*'. One cannot understand the history of medieval Kerala without considering the *swarupams*<sup>16</sup> as all the major rulers belonged to a certain *swarupam* and the Zamorin belonged to the *Nediyiruppu swarupam*, the ruler of Cochin belonged to the *Perumpadappu swarupam*, the king of Travancore belonged to the *Venad swarupam* etc.

"The literal meaning of the term *swarupam*-self figure or self form- does not seem to have any explicit political connotation and an analysis of the root of the word is no help in expounding this unique political system satisfactorily."<sup>17</sup> In simple terms, the term denoted the various political houses that emerged in Kerala after the collapse of the centralized rule of the Cheras of Mahodayapuram. These did not emerge in a single day but they were already present on the political landscape. They rose to prominence as separate political houses only in the twelfth century.<sup>18</sup> Initially they were limited to small families who governed the areas in their vicinity, had access to the products

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<sup>13</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, p. 80

<sup>14</sup> K S Mathew, *Society in Medieval Malabar*, New Delhi: Jaffe Books, 1979, p. 24

<sup>15</sup> According to the legend, the last Chera ruler known as the Cheraman Perumal who reigned over the entire region known as Kerala, accepted Islam and decided to leave all his possessions and go off to Mecca. Before leaving he partitioned his kingdom among his various governors and commanded them to rule over their respective territories.

<sup>16</sup> "All the prominent ruling households (*swarupams*) in Kerala trace their authority and legitimacy to rule over their respective territories to Cheraman Perumal" -Binu J Mailaparambil, *Lords of the Sea*, Leiden: Brill, 2012, p.28

"His (Cheraman Perumal's) legend was engraved in the memory of the people and exercised significant political influence in the latter centuries" (Margaret Frenz cited by Noboru Karashima in *A Concise History of South India: Issues in Interpretations*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014, p.147)

<sup>17</sup> Binu J Mailaparambil, *Lords of the Sea*, pp.28-29

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28



produced in those areas and also collected taxes in these designated areas. Raghava Varier gives the example of the Venad *Utaiyavar*. They were entitled to receive the proceedings from the trade at Quilon and also many other petty proceedings from other types of economic activities. This is evident in the Tharisappally copper plate in which were enshrined the privileges given to the Christian merchant Mar Sapor Isso by the *Utaiyavar* of Venad who later attained the status of being the head of the Venad swarupam.<sup>19</sup> Thus, these political houses were initially governors but their families later expanded their territories to become 'swarupams'.

The Zamorins belonged to the *Nediyiruppu swarupam*<sup>15</sup> who were initially based in Ernad, a land-locked agrarian enclave<sup>16</sup>. After the reign of the last Perumal, the head of this house became an independent ruler or a *swarupi*.<sup>17</sup> They were ambitious and wanted to extend their sovereignty over a greater territory and hence they set out to conquer more regions. They attested their right to conquer the other territories by referring to the fact that the last Perumal, before leaving, gave them his sword, commanding them to 'die, kill and seize'.<sup>18</sup> Calicut initially belonged to the Porlathiris (chiefs of Polanad) and the chief of the *Nediyiruppu swarupam* on realizing the benefits of having a sea port as part of his territory set out to conquer Polanad. It was not an easy conquest but they finally achieved victory by bribing the Porlathiri's wife.<sup>20</sup> Once Polanad was conquered, the Nediyiruppu chiefs took the title of *Kunnalakonathiri* which meant- ruler of the hills (*kunnu*) and waves (*ala*).<sup>21</sup> While the Nediyiruppu chief took up the title of *Kunnalakonathiri*, generally he was called 'Samuri' by the people. This is attributed by the writings of contemporary travelers.<sup>22</sup> The title was anglicized into Zamorin by the

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<sup>19</sup>MR Raghava Varier, *Madhyakalakeralam: Swaropaneethiyute Charithrapatangal*, Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Cooperative Society Ltd, 2014, p.12

<sup>20</sup> Kunhali V (ed.), 'Keralolpatti Granthavari- The Age of Kings', *Calicut in History*, Calicut: University of Calicut, 2004, p.8 The entire episode of how the Zamorin conquered the Porlathiri can be read here.

<sup>21</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, p.14

<sup>22</sup> Mahdi Hussain, *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta*, p.189; R H Major, *India in the Fifteenth Century*, London: Hakluyt Society, p.126

Europeans.<sup>23</sup> The Zamorin was also styled as the *Punturakkon* which means king or lord of the *puntura* (which is seen as a corruption of the word *bantar* in Arabic which means port).<sup>24</sup>

The Zamorin shifted his residence to Calicut and founded a new capital known as Vikramapuram (as a commemoration of his victory) with a Shiva temple at its centre.<sup>25</sup> “The Zamorin’s palace was both a *Koyil* or palace and a *Kotta* or fort. Hence the town that grew up under his protection came to be called Koyilkotta, corrupted into Kolikod (Calicut), and its original name of Vikramapuram utterly got forgotten”<sup>26</sup>

### 1.3. Traders and Trading Strategies

*"It seemed to me, having looked far and wide over twenty years of a sea faring life, that as pure sailing craft carrying on their unspoiled ways, only the Arab remained. Only the Arab remained making his voyages as he always had, in a wind-driven vessel sailing without the benefit of engines. Only the Arab still sailed his wind ships over the free sea, keeping steadfastly to the quieter ways of a kinder past"*<sup>27</sup>

This excerpt is taken from the writings of Alan Villiers, a sailor cum adventurer who sailed off from Kuwait in 1938, proceeded to East Africa and returned after rounding the coast of Arabia. The Arabs were an important trading community in Malabar and hence it is impossible to discuss the trade in Calicut without mentioning them first and foremost.

The arrival of the Zamorin in Calicut coincided with the intensification of trade by the Al-Karimi merchants (the Arabs) who started coming to the ports of Calicut, Cannanore and other minor exchange centers of North Kerala. The presence of Jewish and Chinese traders in Quilon was another reason for the Karimi traders

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<sup>23</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, p.11

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2

<sup>27</sup> Edward A Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History*, New York: University Press, 2014, p.1

choosing to come to Calicut to pursue their trade.<sup>28</sup> "The Karimi merchants constituted an organization or corporation, an organized body of merchants closely knit together, a collective group of men who associated themselves for the pursuit of a common commercial goal- trade in pepper and spices."<sup>29</sup>

While the Karimis were from Mamluk Egypt, there was a group of local Muslim merchants too, who were known as the Mappillas and the Marakkars. They formed an important commercial group in the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean region. "Their spheres of activity, though geographically originated in Malabar, were linked with the pan-Islamic commercial network, which ultimately terminated in the ports of the Red Sea and the Mediterranean."<sup>30</sup> The Marakkar merchants controlled the trade in the coastal regions of Malabar and Coromandel supplying rice and provisions to food-deficit zones of Kerala. They began to settle down in Calicut, Cochin and Cannanore by the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>31</sup> The Mappilla merchants were involved in peddling trade and belonged to the lowest strata of society. Barbosa writes that much of the trade in the sea-ports was controlled by them.<sup>32</sup> The importance of the Muslims to the commerce and the political endeavours of the Zamorin is made clear by the fact that the post of *Shah Bandar* was given to a Muslim known as *Kozhikottu Koya*.<sup>33</sup>

The famed Chinese general Cheng Ho came to Calicut in 1405 with a huge fleet. From the fourteenth century onwards, Chinese junks began frequenting Calicut and these merchants even had their own factory in the first half of the fourteenth century which was known as the '*cheenacotta*'.<sup>34</sup> The Chinese came with fine silk cloth, porcelain and brassware's and took spices in exchange. In the six voyages that were

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<sup>28</sup> Pius Malekandathil, 'Winds of Change and Links of Continuity: A Study on the Merchant Groups of Kerala and the Channels of their Trade, 1000-1800', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol.50, No. 2/3, 2007, p.266

<sup>29</sup> K S Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*, p.14

<sup>30</sup> Pius Malekandathil, *Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Polity in the Indian Ocean*, p.131

<sup>31</sup> Pius Malekandathil, 'Winds of Change and Links of Continuity: A Study on the Merchant Groups of Kerala and the Channels of their Trade, 1000-1800', p.267

<sup>32</sup> Henry E J Stanley (trans.), *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar*, London: Haklyut Society, p.146

<sup>33</sup> MGS Narayanan, 'The City of Honesty', in Kunhali V, *Calicut in History*, p.37

<sup>34</sup> Pius Malekandathil, 'Societal Process and a Mercantile City', p.3

conducted by Cheng Ho, they made a stop at the port city of Calicut in most cases. Due to these voyages, many Chinese merchants came to Calicut to sell their wares. Ma Huan, the chronicler who traveled with Cheng Ho gives us a description of how the commodities were exchanged.

“When a ship arrives from China, the king’s overseer with a Chitti, go abroad and make an invoice of the goods and a day is settled for valuing the cargo. On the day appointed, the silk goods, more specifically the *khinkis* (kincobs) are first inspected and valued, which when decided on, all present join hands, whereupon the broker says- The price of your goods is now fixed and cannot in any way be altered.”<sup>35</sup>

We also get to know that the intermediaries and brokers at work in the port were efficient. Ma Huan further writes,

“They (brokers) have no abacus on which to make their calculations but in its place, they use their toes and fingers, and, what is very wonderful, they are never wrong in their reckonings.”<sup>36</sup> “In Calicut too, whenever a few merchants came to take in cargo, the King used to appoint a Nair to protect them, and a *chatim* clerk to keep the accounts and a broker to arrange the needed commodities. This sort of treatment was given to all the foreign merchants without any preference or discrimination.”<sup>37</sup>

The foreign merchants like the Arabs, Persians, Gujaratis, Khurasanis and Deccanis had settled down on the Malabar Coast especially in Calicut with their families for the sake of trade.<sup>38</sup> Barbosa mentions that

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<sup>35</sup> Geo Phillips, ‘Ma Huan’s Account of Cochin, Calicut and Aden’, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, April 1896, p.346

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p.347

<sup>37</sup> K S Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*, p.16

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p.14

the Gujarati merchants were shown great honour and favour by the Zamorin as they generated much revenue for him from their trade.<sup>39</sup>

"Thus, the people from all over the world interested in trade had their share in the trade on the Malabar Coast and nobody claimed or fought for any sort of monopoly over it. The participants were not in the name of any government; but they did business in their individual or collective capacity"<sup>40</sup>

On the shore there were custom houses to which all the vessels had to go for paying the king's dues.<sup>41</sup> Different categories of officers kept a watch of things that landed, to note down the number and quantity of cargo in the register of cargo, on the basis of which the king's due at the custom house was levied. Then the commodities were stored in the store houses under lock which had only two keys- one with the merchant and one with the officer of the king.<sup>42</sup> The *Alfandique* or the customs house was located in between the town and the port and the town, at a distance of 200-300 paces from the sea, was well guarded by security guards around it. The bulk of the transactions were held in the mercantile city which was located near the sea side or the *alfandique*, separated from the royal quarters by two kilometers.<sup>43</sup> Abder Razzak writes,

"The officers of the custom house take upon themselves the charge of looking after the merchandise over which they keep watch day and night. When a sale is effected they levy a duty on the goods of 1/4th part, if they are not sold, they make no charge on them whatsoever."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Henry E J Stanley, *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar*, p.146

<sup>40</sup> K S Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*, p.16

<sup>41</sup> Albert Gray (ed.), *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, p. 361

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.361

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.362

<sup>44</sup> R H Major, *India in the Fifteenth Century*, p.121

Tome Pires writes, “Calicut is a very famous port and is the best thing in all Malabar. Many nations used to have great factories here; each country used to bring its merchandise here, and a great business of barter and exchange took place.”<sup>45</sup>

#### **1.4. Expansion of Territory and Hinterlands**

After securing Calicut for himself and establishing his control over the trade in Calicut, The Zamorin set out to conquer more territories that were crucial to the availability of spices and other commodities for its export trade. Lakshmi Subramaniam writes, “Ports draw on vital and robust hinterlands that support and sustain their activities.”<sup>46</sup> While Calicut was the primary capital of the Zamorin, Ponnani became his secondary capital and he had a palace there. It was also called his military capital as the Nairs who constituted the fighting force of the Zamorin resided in Ponnani. The Arab merchants were of great support to the Zamorin in his expansionist vision as this in turn would help them receive greater volume of commodities.

Having gained control of Calicut and Ponnani through conquest, the Zamorin set out carving for himself more interior areas and incorporated them as part of his kingdom. Since spices were the most important commodity, it was necessary to maintain an uninterrupted flow of this cargo for its overseas trade. This could be possible only if the Zamorin had control over the spice producing areas. The rulers of Chaliyam, Beypore, Parappanad, Vettatunad, Kurumbranad fell before the mighty force of the Zamorin and acknowledging his sovereignty, handed over the right to the produce of their lands in order to meet the demands of the trade at Calicut.

“The important spice producing hinterland of Calicut consisted of a long chain of rich fertile areas like Wayanad, Kootatai, Kuttiady, Thamarassery, Kunnamangalam, Chathamangalam, Mukkom, Mavoor, Mankavu, Nilambur, Edavanna and Thanur. In the south the chiefdoms of

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<sup>45</sup> Armando Cortesao (ed.), *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, p.78

<sup>46</sup> Lakshmi Subramaniam (ed.), *Ports, Towns, Cities: A Historical Tour of the Indian Littoral*, Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2008, p. 12

Koratty, Cranganore, Parur, Chettuva, Alengad, Cochin and Vadakkenkur were also brought within the economic orbit of Calicut and were made to be the principal hinterlands through the chain of conquests that the Zamorin undertook prior to the advent of the Europeans.<sup>47</sup> We thus, see the keenness of the Zamorin in annexing territories in order to showcase his authority as well as ensure supply of commodities.

“The Muslim trading groups who dominated the trade of pepper were neither involved from its production through the direct ownership of land nor did they purchase the spice directly from the cultivators. The pepper was not taken straight to the markets of the coastal ports, but assembled at trading locations further inland along roads, rivers or backwaters and only later transported to those markets that promised the best prices.”

Therefore, the pepper in any particular market did not necessarily consist of the produce of its own immediate hinterland.<sup>48</sup> Such was the case with other commodities as well. Calicut was the meeting point where commodities from various regions could be assembled and displayed for the traders and merchants.

Around this time, the Perumpadappu swarupam chief started moving to the maritime exchange centre of Cochin and tried to attract a wide variety of merchant groups such as the “Muslim traders linked with the West Asian trade, Chetties associated with the Coromandel and Canara Coast, the Kelings linked with Southeast Asian commerce and the Chinese.”<sup>49</sup> His efforts did bring fruit as the Jewish traders expanded to Cochin as Quilon was slowly declining. However, the Zamorin with the help of his supporters in the vicinity, captured Cochin and made the Raja his vassal by commanding him to “pay an annual tribute, obtain his (Zamorin’s) permission before accession, sent contingents to the Zamorin’s army and refrain from striking coins or

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<sup>47</sup> Shinoy Jesinth, *Urbanity and Spatial Processes: A Study on the Colonial City of Calicut.*, Unpublished PhD Thesis submitted to Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady, 2013, pp.96-7

<sup>48</sup> Sebastian Prange, ‘Measuring by the bushel: Reweighing the Indian Ocean Pepper Trade’, *Historical Research*, Vol 84, no 224, May 2011, pp.218, 228

<sup>49</sup> Pius Malekandathil, ‘Winds of Change and Links of Continuity: A Study on the Merchant Groups of Kerala and the Channels of their Trade, 1000-1800’, p.268

roofing his palace with tiles. Added to this he had to send all his pepper to Calicut, Thus, depriving him the right to navigation which was handed to the Muslim traders from Calicut.”<sup>50</sup>

Meanwhile, in Cannanore, the Mappila Muslims were empowered by trade, and they had a ruler, a hereditary role which was passed from maternal uncle to nephew who had the right to administer justice and represent the Muslim population before the king.<sup>51</sup> He later came to be known as the *Mamale* and his emergence was seen as the crystallization of the ambitions of the Muslim community. “In his seeming attempts to defend the Kolathunad chief from the Portuguese, he ceaselessly competed and sometimes diminished the Kolathiri’s (title of the Kolathunadu chief) power, Thus, preparing a way for the Ali Rajas who later rejected the royal authority.”<sup>52</sup> The Ali Rajas of Cannanore became one of the important rulers in the political scenario of Kerala in the sixteenth century.

The period between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries is marked by the fragmentation of central authority in Kerala and the rise of individual principalities which were ambitious to gain more territories and also control the bulk of the trade in the ports on the Malabar Coast. The merchant communities adapted to this by

“catering to the needs of the regional networks and linking themselves with international trade networks. Religious affinities were used to cement commercial partnerships and strengthen mercantile networks. The Muslim merchants made themselves acceptable to the local chieftains of Calicut and Cannanore by maintaining linkages with the wider markets and exchange centers of the Indian Ocean and the Eastern Mediterranean.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, p. 131

<sup>51</sup> Genevieve Bouchon, *Regent of the Sea*, p.24

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24

<sup>53</sup> Pius Malekandathil, ‘Winds of Change and Links of Continuity: A Study on the Merchant Groups of Kerala and the Channels of their Trade, 1000-1800’, p.269



## 1.5. Routes of Connectivity

"The frequent movement of people, commodities and ideas through the oceanic spaces between the maritime exchange centers of India and the nodal centers of its hinterland during this period helped to reduce the relative isolation of the rural and the semi-rural societies and relatively overcome the growth restraints by facilitating the integration of far-flung production centers with the various exchange centers of the coastal rim in an intense way, causing some forces of early modernity to permeate into the subcontinent."<sup>54</sup>

Calicut as a port functioned as the junction where the commodities from far and wide were brought together. Hence though many of the regions were located in the interior, due to excellent networks of connectivity, they were represented by their goods at the port. The various commodities found in the different regions were brought to Calicut by various routes and it is important to note the different areas which supplied the required commodities to Calicut. The riverine trade routes were the backbone of the trade at Calicut. It afforded the easiest and cheapest means of transport and Thus, it is not a surprise that the foreign powers wanting to set up factories chose sites, always close to rivers or situated on rivers.<sup>55</sup> "The Portuguese, the English, the French, and the Danes had factories in the Zamorin's territory at Calicut where the produce from the dependents of the Zamorin namely the Payurmala Nayars, the Kurumbranad Rajas, the Tamarasseri branch of the Kottayam family, the Parappanad Rajas, and the Puluwayi Nayars was brought in by the waterways."<sup>56</sup> Different riverine and land routes were utilized to transport the commodities to the port.

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<sup>54</sup> Pius Malekandathil (ed.), *The Indian Ocean in the Making of Early Modern India*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2016, p. 7

<sup>55</sup> William Logan, *Malabar*, Vol I, Madras: Government Press, 1951, p.8

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8

### 1.5.1 Riverine Routes

“Calicut was connected to its vast pepper producing hinterland by a number of rivers and of them Chaliyar and Kallayi are the notable ones. The Kallayi river originates from the Cherukkulathur elevation and flows towards south-west connecting the distribution centers or bazaars called ‘*chanthas*’ at Velliparamba, Palazhi, Puthur, Iringallur, Kailamattom, Pantheerakavu, where it is joined by a tributary of the Chaliyar river bifurcated from Mukkathukadavu. In the Olvanna region, south east of Calicut, this tributary of Chaliyar which joins Kallayi river is of vital importance for the trade of Calicut. It is through this passage that the extensive cultivable space, located on the banks of the river Chaliyar such as Nilambur, Chungathara, Edavannappara and Mavur was linked with the Calicut port.”<sup>57</sup>

### 1.5.2 Land Routes

There were two major land routes which connected the south eastern and north-eastern areas of the city with Kunnamangalam. These routes merged into the ghat routes, one originating from Mukkom and the other from Kootathai, an important spice producing area. These two routes met at the centre of Kunnamangalam and went directly to the port city.<sup>58</sup> In 1498, Vasco da Gama, traveled from Pantalayani to Kappad via Thiruvangur by land route, crossed the Korapuzha, went to the temples of Puthur and Varakkal and then entered the city. We can infer about the existence of a highway from Pantalayani to Kappad and from there via Puthur to the city of Calicut. While this highway is recorded in the Zamorin’s palace records dated 1596, two other records in 1731 contain details of a road from Ponnani to Calicut via Beypore, Tiruvachira (present Meenchantha) and Panniankara.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Pius Malekandathil, ‘Rubrics of Power and Trade in Calicut’, in G. Archa, *Calicut and Cosmopolitanism*, (Cafe Dissensus), February, 2016, p.2

<sup>58</sup>Shinoy Jesinth, *Urbanity and Spatial Processes: A Study on the Colonial City of Calicut*, p.95

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p.96

The mountainous track that surrounded the city had two breaking outlets, one with the places of Valayanad, Iringallur, Palazhi, and Olavanna through which the Kallayi river flows and the other via Thamarasseri, Kootatai, Thalakulathur and Vengeri area through which the Korapuzha flows. Chaliyar makes a direct break to these cliffs at Feroke region separating Nallur and Kadalundi areas. These breaking points used to link Calicut with Mysore, Gudallur, and Coimbatore areas which were areas that produced a variety of commodities for export at Calicut.<sup>60</sup> The hill products of Wayanad also used to find their way to Calicut and *angadis* or little market towns came up as trading centers on the way from Wayanad to Calicut.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, we can infer that an extensive network of communication was present which enabled the transfer of commodities from one region to another. Without efficient communication networks, it would have been difficult for Calicut to rise up as a port even if it was located near the sea. Commodities valuable to traders and merchants from far and wide are the lifeline of any port and without these, it is impossible to conceive the idea of the emergence of a bustling port. These networks would have ensured connectivity and inter-mingling between producers in the interior regions and peddling traders who brought in the commodities to the satellite ports like Ponnani, Pantalayani etc from where it was brought forward to Calicut. Good transport systems are another sign of the beginning of urbanity as along with the tangible goods, intangible aspects such as ideas, culture etc would also have been transferred. Urban centers evolve due to increased connectivity and inter-mingling of people of different backgrounds. The process of procuring commodities indeed must have served that purpose.

## **1.6. Items of Trade**

*On the sea, such storms and perils*

*That death, many times seemed imminent;*

*On the land, such battle and intrigue*

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<sup>60</sup> Shinoy Jesinth, *Urbanity and Spatial Processes: A Study on the Colonial City of Calicut*, p.96

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.96

*Such dire, inevitable hardships!  
Where may frail humanity shelter  
Briefly, in some secure port,  
Where the bright heavens cease to vent their rage  
On such insects on so small a stage?*

- **Luis de Camoes**<sup>62</sup>

Sailing was not child's play but Arab traders and later the Europeans came from far and wide to the Malabar Coast. Why? It was not just an adventure. More than discovering new territories, these men came with the primary aim of harnessing the products especially the spices this coast had to offer. Along with spices such as pepper, cardamom etc., there were other commodities too that the traders were interested in. Abder Razzak writes, "Calicut is a perfectly secure harbour which, like that of Ormuz, brings together merchants from every city and every country; in it are to be found abundance of precious articles brought thither from maritime countries."<sup>63</sup>

Pepper was one of the most important items for export. Since ancient times, pepper was in great demand. It was one of the most important articles of trade between India and Rome. Pliny, the famed Roman historian writes,

"It is quite surprising that the use of pepper has come so much into fashion, seeing that in other substances which we use, it is sometimes their sweetness, and sometimes their appearance that has attracted our notice; whereas, pepper has nothing in it that can plead as a recommendation to either fruit or berry, its only quality being a certain pungency; and yet it is for this that we import it all the way from India."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Edward A Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History*, pp.4,5

<sup>63</sup> R H Major, *India in the Fifteenth Century*, p.121

<sup>64</sup> Wilfred H Schoff (trans.), *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, New Delhi: Oriental Reprint, 1974, p.215

Before the Portuguese discovery of the Cape route, the price of pepper was so high that in medieval Europe, the price for a pound of pepper (two shillings) was equal to the pay of a carpenter for four days! Yet the demand for it never got reduced.<sup>65</sup>

Nicolo Conti describes Calicut as an emporium abounding in pepper, lac, ginger, a larger kind of cinnamon, myrobolans and zedoary.<sup>66</sup> Athanasius Nikitin's mentions, "Calecot (Calicut) produces pepper, ginger, musceat, cloves, cinnamon, aromatic roots and every description of spices."<sup>67</sup>

Rice was imported as the soil was not feasible for the cultivation of rice.<sup>68</sup> It was shipped from Gujarat to Calicut in the early sixteenth century.<sup>69</sup> The land around Calicut was utilized for salt panning.<sup>70</sup> Around sixty centers of salt production were found in the vicinity of Calicut. Salt was used as a commodity of exchange for procuring items of everyday use from the hinterland.<sup>71</sup> The local Muslim merchants traded in rice, salt and everyday provisions.

## 1.7. Arrival of European Powers

### 1.7.1 The Portuguese

Toward the close of the fifteenth century, Calicut had acquired an unparalleled position politically and commercially and it was because of this importance that the Portuguese decided to enter into trade relations with the King of Calicut and consequently the century long fight to get hold of the port of Calicut was undertaken by the Portuguese.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Wilfred H Schoff (trans.), *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, p.215

<sup>66</sup> R H Major, *India in the Fifteenth Century*, p.176

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.215

<sup>68</sup> N M Nambootiri, *Samootiri Charitratile Kanaappurangal*, p.56

<sup>69</sup> Simon Digby, 'The Maritime Trade of India' in Tapan Raychaudhari and Irfan Habib (ed.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol I, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.147

<sup>70</sup> M R Raghava Varier wrote an essay titled 'Uppulungalil Ponthiya Nagaram' on Calicut. Salt production was thus an important activity in Calicut- *Ibid.*, p.59

<sup>71</sup> N M Nambootiri, *Samootiri Charitratile Kanaappurangal*, p.59-60

<sup>72</sup> K S Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1983, p.4

"When the Portuguese at last, rounding the Cape of Good Hope burst into the Indian Ocean like a pack of hungry wolves upon a well-stocked sheep-walk, they found a peaceful and a prosperous commerce, that had been elaborated during 3000 years by the Phoenicians and Arabs, being carried on along all its shores."<sup>73</sup>

The fifteenth century saw the rise of the Portuguese power as soldiers and traders alike were sent to consolidate the hold upon this newly discovered territory.<sup>74</sup> The Portuguese came with the aim to monopolize the trade and to get the traders to offer to them at a price they fixed. They were not aware of the nature of trade at Calicut and other ports in Kerala and were amazed when they realized that the system of trade prevalent on the Malabar Coast was sophisticated and organized. (In a letter written to the king of Portugal, the Zamorin states, "In my kingdom there is abundance of cinnamon, cloves, ginger, pepper, and precious stones. What I seek from thy country is gold, silver, scarlet and pepper."<sup>75</sup> )

They also realized that they had abundant competition and that the Muslim merchants controlled the bulk of the trade in this region. On arrival at Calicut, the Portuguese were astonished to hear the abrupt address of two Moorish traders from Tunis in Castilian, "May the Devil take thee! What brought you thither?" The author of the *Roteiro*<sup>76</sup> writes, "We were greatly astonished to hear this talk, for we never expected to hear our language spoken so far away from Portugal."<sup>77</sup> Although Vasco da Gama was welcomed well by the Zamorin, nothing substantial resulted from the meeting. During the time Gama spent in Calicut, he tried to sell his wares but they were not suitable for the market at Calicut. Gama complained that the Muslim

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<sup>73</sup> Sir George Birdwood cited in E F Oaten, *European Travellers in India*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1991, p.51

<sup>74</sup> E F Oaten, *European Travellers in India*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1991, pp.54-5

<sup>75</sup> Wilfred H Schoff (trans.), *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, p.227

<sup>76</sup> An anonymous journal of the first voyage of Vasco da Gama, published by the Hakluyt Society - E F Oaten, *European Travellers in India*, p52

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52

merchants were hindering his trade and the Zamorin offered him assistance by sending a broker and later at his own cost conveyed the goods.<sup>78</sup> Herein we can see how the Zamorin was involved in the trading activities though he himself did not engage in trade. His attitude to allow all traders to be able to trade freely and fairly can be observed here. We can also observe how he was impartial and responded to the complaint of an European trader who had just arrived in Calicut. Thus, Calicut was a port where everyone could trade freely without hindering the rights of other traders. We see how efforts were taken to maintain the inclusive environment of trade. It is not a wonder therefore that many of the travelers make mention of Calicut with praiseworthy words.

After sailing from Calicut, Gama was welcomed by the Kolathiri who was not on good relations with the Zamorin.<sup>79</sup> The warnings of the Zamorin against the Portuguese were to no avail and the rulers who were awed by their military strength gave into the demands without as a much a thought. Their primary agenda was to increase their individual hold over their territories and maintain their independence from the Zamorin. However, they did not realize the foolishness of their efforts until much later.

The local Muslim merchants were quite powerful. The Marakkar merchants were initially at good terms with the Portuguese and at one time even managed to array 1500 men to fight against the Zamorin for safeguarding the interests of the Portuguese.<sup>80</sup> The Portuguese had to rely upon the Marakkar merchants as the latter supplied food materials from the Coromandel ports and spices from the hinterland of Kerala. They had to collaborate with the Marakkar merchants as they provided the cargo that was to be sent back to Portugal. Under Cherina Marakkar, the Marakkars of Cochin commanded great respect from the Portuguese, even getting special privileges and protection from the King of Portugal. "He started supplying the

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<sup>78</sup> R S Whiteway, *The Rise of the Portuguese Power in India: 1497-1550*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2007, p.80

<sup>79</sup> K M Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese*, New Delhi: Voice of India, reprint, 1997, p.38

<sup>80</sup> K S Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*, p.210, p.211

Portuguese with spices from 1503 onwards. Others who cooperated with the Portuguese were- Mame Marakkar who distributed food materials from the Coromandel ports, Mitos Marakkar who supplied cinnamon from Ceylon, Ali Apule, Coje Mapilla and Abraham Mapilla who regularly took pepper from the inland markets of Edappilly to the Portuguese at Cochin. Some of the Syrian Christian traders like Mathias from Quilon, Tarqe Tome of Kayamkulam also collaborated with the Portuguese as a method of being able to continue with their trade.”<sup>81</sup> The local merchants did benefit from the coming of the Portuguese as the latter tried their best to maintain good relations with them in order to ensure the uninterrupted supply of commodities. They even received payments in advance (in terms of articles of daily need, at times when they had nothing to live on) for a definite volume of commodities to be delivered to the factory.<sup>82</sup>

However, as they started gaining a foothold in the trade in Calicut, the Portuguese started showing their true colours and their intention to monopolize the trade rather than peacefully conduct trade in collaboration with others. The major obstacle in their move was the Arab merchants who controlled a major share of the trade.

“The Portuguese had to compete for trade with the Arabs, who, for several hundred years, had carried on commerce with the East as peaceful traders, to the mutual advantage of the native rulers and of themselves....the Arabs had established a strong bond of union which it was necessary to break down before the Portuguese could hope to replace their predecessors in the possession of the Eastern trade, and so lucrative was this trade that they were not likely to abandon it without a violent struggle. Two methods lay open to the Portuguese for the accomplishment of this object; the one was by successful competition, and the

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<sup>81</sup> Pius Malekandathil, *Winds of Change and Links of Continuity: A Study on the Merchant Groups of Kerala and the Channels of their Trade, 1000-1800*, p. 270

<sup>82</sup> K S Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*, p.210



other by force. The principle of peaceful commercial rivalry was, However, not yet understood, and the latter alternative was therefore adopted in order to dispossess the Arabs of their long-established trade.”<sup>83</sup>

In 1500, an Arab ship was captured by the Portuguese and this led to a riot, involving the death of Aires Correa, the Portuguese factor and a few others. In retaliation Cabral bombarded Calicut, resulting in the death of many locals.<sup>84</sup> He escaped to Cochin for safety as he knew the Zamorin and his subjects would not lay low. By siding with Cochin, the Portuguese wanted to take control over the rich hinterland of Cochin that supplied the best quality pepper.<sup>85</sup> The Arab merchants in Calicut were never a pleasant sight to the Portuguese and though they tried to convince the Zamorin to evict them, they could not succeed. In 1502, the Portuguese tried to get the ruler of Calicut to expel his ‘foreign’ Muslim traders, but he responded that he could not do this, “for it was unthinkable that he expel 4000 households of them, who lived in Calicut as natives, not foreigners, and who had contributed great profits to his Kingdom.”<sup>86</sup>

“The most remarkable change introduced by the Portuguese in the prevalent trading patterns was the system of control namely the devices *cartaz-armada-fortress* and *cafila*. The introduction of licenses for trade, the regular coastal patrolling, controlling of the commodity flow with the help of a chain of fortresses, and the movement of vessels in caravans were all tactics devised by the Portuguese to stop the flow of spices to the Eastern Mediterranean and to make the vessels plying the Indian Ocean converge at Portuguese

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<sup>83</sup> F C Danvers, *The Portuguese in India*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2003, p.xxxiv-xxxv

<sup>84</sup> R S Whiteway, *The Rise of the Portuguese Power in India: 1497-1550*, pp.84-87

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.88

<sup>86</sup> Michael Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders: The Swahili Coast, India and Portugal in the Early Modern Era*, London: John Hopkins University Press, 1998, p.140

exchange centers, facilitating the attempts of the Portuguese crown to monopolize the spice trade.”<sup>87</sup>

The policies adopted by the Portuguese such as the restrictions on the movement of the merchants and the monopoly imposed on the trade on the Malabar Coast succeeded in reducing the number of foreign Muslims, who were involved in the trade of Calicut.<sup>88</sup> Barbosa writes, “And after the King of Portugal made himself master there (Calicut), and these Moors saw that they could not defend it, they began to leave the country, and little by little they went away from it, so that very few of them remain.”<sup>89</sup> We can infer even from the writings of Barbosa, how he attributes the King of Portugal to being the master at Calicut; the underlying meanings. The Portuguese with all their tactics wanted to usurp the spice trade and monopolize it. However, their aims were never completely met with success as the Zamorin and the Muslim merchants fiercely fought back against Portuguese domination.

“The Arabs whose trade was a source of considerable profit to the native rulers of India, also intrigued with those Princes for the exclusion of the Portuguese from their territories. In this they were in many cases for a time successful, and with none to a greater extent than with the Zamorin of Calicut, then the most powerful potentate of the Malabar Coast.”<sup>90</sup>

New trade routes developed in the light of the restrictions placed by the Portuguese. The coastal trade was affected due to the Portuguese interference but the trade conducted through land routes flourished.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Pius Malekandathil, ‘Winds of Change and Links of Continuity: A Study on the Merchant Groups of Kerala and the Channels of their Trade, 1000-1800’, p.272

<sup>88</sup> K S Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*, p.207

<sup>89</sup> Henry E J Stanley (trans.), *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar*, p.147

<sup>90</sup> F C Danvers, *The Portuguese in India*, p.xxxv

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p.209

While the Zamorin did give permission to build a factory in Calicut in 1513, they never completely trusted the Portuguese. And this move of the Zamorin proved fatal as the Arab merchants left Calicut for good, fearing the wrath and atrocities of the Portuguese. They also felt they were betrayed by the Zamorin in whom they had trusted to maintain opposition against the Portuguese. They fled to the ports of Gujarat, Vijayanagara, Hormuz and the Red Sea. However, the trade at Calicut did not completely vanish due to the presence of the Marakkar merchants as they maintained trade with the Portuguese and also started sending spices to ports of the Red Sea. This was possible due to the increasing help extended to them by the private trading lobby among the Portuguese officials.<sup>92</sup>

The Portuguese soon started targeting the Marakkar merchants and this did not go well with the latter. The Marakkars under the leadership of the Kunjali Marakkar shifted their base from Cochin to Calicut in 1524 in order to organize guerilla warfare and corsair activities against the Portuguese<sup>93</sup> and this was an opportunity exploited by the Zamorin who sided with the merchants to reorganize the trade of Calicut. The Mapillas also joined them in their resistance.<sup>94</sup> In 1525, the Portuguese were expelled by the Zamorin and trade continued between the Marakkars and the Ottoman Empire. The Marakkars were in constant combat at sea against the Portuguese and they were a force to reckon with. Kunjali Marakkar was made the admiral of the navy of the Zamorin. The guerilla warfare tactics adopted by the Marakkars were a constant source of terror for the Portuguese. They too attacked the Marakkars in all possible ways. Despite heavy losses, the Mappilla sea men fought under the leadership of the Marakkar chief. Under the able leadership of able Marakkar chiefs, the Muslim merchants continued to trouble the Portuguese.<sup>95</sup>

In 1571, Chaliyam was captured from the Portuguese by the Zamorin with the help of Kunjali III, who was given the permission to build a Marakkar Kotta at Putupattanam

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<sup>92</sup> Pius Malekandathil, 'Winds of Change and Links of Continuity: A Study on the Merchant Groups of Kerala and the Channels of their Trade, 1000-1800', p.271

<sup>93</sup> Pius Malekandathil, *Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Polity in the Indian Ocean*, p.138

<sup>94</sup> S M Mohamed Koya, *Mappilas of Malabar*, Calicut: Sandhya Publications, 1983, p.29

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29

(Kottakal). The attacks on the Portuguese did not end and eventually the Portuguese tried to negotiate for peace with the Zamorin. It resulted in their obtaining permission to build a factory at Ponnani in 1584. This time, the move of the Zamorin resulted in the decision being resented by the Kunjalis. They retorted by inflicting two crushing defeats on the Portuguese in 1586 and 1589.<sup>96</sup> In 1595, Muhammad Kunjali Marakkar succeeded as the next Marakkar chief and assumed the titles – King of the Moors, Defender of Islam and Lord of the Seas and further went ahead and fortified his settlement at Kottakal.<sup>97</sup>

This development from the part of the Marakkar chief was not appreciated by the Zamorin and he joined hands with the Portuguese to oust the chief and destroy his fort. The Zamorin succeeded in besieging the fort and the Kunjali accepted to surrender to his master the Zamorin on the condition that his life would be spared. The Zamorin agreed to the condition but the vengeful Portuguese wanted the end of these sea men and they were taken to Goa and executed. Thus, ended the career of the Kunjalis, who were one of the greatest allies the Zamorin had and helped him tackle the Portuguese like none other. It later proved to be one of the greatest mistakes of the Zamorin to handover the Kunjali as this decision of his, commenced the derailing of the amicable relations the Zamorin had with the Muslim traders.

There was no combined resistance against the Portuguese as the rulers were divided by petty power struggles as mentioned above. The rivalry between Calicut and Cochin was the icing on the cake for the Portuguese as this provided them with the opportunity to impose their demands and receive unprecedented gains.

### **1.7.2. The Dutch and the English**

“Kerala (Malabar) and the west coast of India extending from Mount Deli in the north to Kanniya Kumari (Cape Comorin) in the south was the last of the Dutch acquisitions taken

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<sup>96</sup> K M Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese*, p.139

<sup>97</sup> S M Mohamed Koya, *Mappillas of Malabar*, p.31

from the Portuguese and of great commercial and political importance to the VOC.<sup>98</sup> Commercially the high quality albeit more expensive, pepper from Malabar was held to be a welcome addition to the lower quality, and therefore cheaper supplies in Sumatra and elsewhere in the Indonesian archipelago.”<sup>99</sup>

The Dutch came to Calicut with the same aim as the Portuguese- to monopolize the trade and little else. The Zamorin saw them as a potential ally against the Portuguese and entered into a treaty with them in 1604, giving them the right to open a factory at Ponnani and Calicut and in return wanted help to reduce Cranganore.<sup>100</sup> He also wanted to recover his hold over Cochin. However, once the Dutch settled in Cochin, they did not care to fulfill the terms of the treaty and even instigated the Cochin Rajah against the Zamorin.<sup>101</sup> The treaty was of no great benefit. In 1614 there arose a quarrel between the Cochin Raja and the Portuguese. The Zamorin exploited the opportunity and laid siege to Cranganore. It was a long point of contention between the Zamorin and the Portuguese before the latter were finally defeated with the help of the Dutch. In 1662, a new treaty was formed between the Dutch and the Zamorin according to which Cranganore and Vaipin would be ceded to the Zamorin along with compelling the Cochin Raja to ally with the Zamorin in return for the monopoly over pepper. Thus, in 1663, with the fall of Cranganore and Cochin after much effort, the Portuguese came to the end of their power in Malabar.<sup>102</sup>

However, the relations with the Dutch also were not completely amicable. Though treaties were signed, the Dutch wanted a hold over Cochin and this was a major point of contention. After the fall of Cranganore, the Dutch did not keep the terms of the treaty as giving away Cranganore and Vaipin meant giving away hold over Cochin and this would be detrimental to the Dutch.<sup>103</sup> The attitude of the Dutch made the

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<sup>98</sup> VOC- Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie was the Dutch East India Company

<sup>99</sup> Mark Vink, 'The Dutch East India Company and the Pepper Trade Between Kerala and Tamilnad, 1663-1795: A Geo-Historical Analysis' in K S Mathew (ed.), *Mariners Merchants and Oceans: Studies in Maritime History*, New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1995, p.274

<sup>100</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, p. 214

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p.221

Zamorin concentrate his attention on obtaining another ally and Thus, he gave permission to the English who were the commercial rivals of the Dutch, to build a factory in Calicut in 1664. William Foster writes, “We had several invitations from the king of Calicut (or Samarin) who hath in manner courted us once more to settle in his port at Calicut, promising all respect and civil usage...He seems to esteeme much of us and hath promised that, if we will settle a factory, not to admit if any Dutch come into his country.”<sup>104</sup> However, the English became aware of the real motives of the Zamorin as is evident from a letter written by English merchants stating that the Zamorin was pretending to break off relations with the Dutch and being friendly with the English in order to prevent the former from becoming the masters of his country.<sup>105</sup>

Though later the Dutch came to terms with the Zamorin, the latter knew that it was a move of diplomacy rather than friendship and Thus, he utilized that time to build more alliances with nearby rulers. Kayamkulam, Purakkad, Parur, Tekkanur and Vadakkankur were asked to be the allies of the Zamorin.<sup>106</sup> A new treaty was also signed with the English in 1699. The Dutch were not happy with how the Zamorin was gaining ties with the English as this meant greater trade benefits for the English. The relations with the Dutch were marked by the signing of various treaties; the terms of which were followed by the signing parties at their own convenience. The lack of unity among the native rulers was exploited- “the crafty Hollander made use of, and for his money got great part of the natives to connive at his landing; for had they united themselves together, the Hollanders would not have ventured to have landed their soldiers.”<sup>107</sup>

Moens described the Dutch relations with Zamorins in the following way,

“The Company has as a rule had much trouble with the Zamorins, has had from time to time to wage expensive wars with them, and has found them the

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<sup>104</sup> T I Poonen, *A Survey of the Rise of the Dutch Power in Malabar (1603-78)*, Trichinopoly: St Joseph's Industrial School Press, 1943p. 180

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p.184

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p.227

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p.167

most unworthy of all the Malabar kings....The cause of these troubles has been chiefly the Cochin kingdom; for between these two kingdoms there was always an irreconcilable hatred, and we were more or less obliged to take the part of Cochin on account of the great interest that the company notoriously has in the continued existence of the Cochin State.”<sup>108</sup>

One cannot miss but notice the importance of Cochin for the Dutch company. The availability of good quality pepper in a great quantity in Cochin was one of the primary reasons for the Dutch to hold on to Cochin despite the costs incurred. Philippus Baldaeus writes, “The pepper of Calecut is of lesser grain than those of Cananor or Cochin.”<sup>109</sup> Ma Huan also writes, “The land of the kingdom of Cochin has no other product, but produces only pepper.”<sup>110</sup>

The Zamorin enlisted the help of the various European powers according to his need. It definitely does make the reader feel that the European powers and their meddling led to the downfall of Calicut. The Malabar Coast did look like a scene of intense competition but the Zamorins were able to fight and maintain their rule. However, the appearance of the Mysoreans changed the situation. They came at the invitation of the Palghat Raja in 1732 and appeared again in the consecutive years. In 1774, The Mysoreans finally occupied Calicut and the members of the Zamorin’s family took refuge in Travancore and only in 1792, when Malabar was ceded to the British, did they return.<sup>111</sup>

## 1.8. Conclusion

“Rulers might restrict themselves to being customers in both senses of the word, they might enter the market as producers or as consumers, they might be merchants themselves, they

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<sup>108</sup> T I Poonen, *A Survey of the Rise of the Dutch Power in Malabar (1603-78)*, p.189

<sup>109</sup> Philippus Baldaeus, *A True and Exact Description of the Most Celebrated East Indian Coasts of Malabar and Coromandel*, p.622

<sup>110</sup> J V G Mills (ed. and trans.), *Ying-yai Sheng-lan (The Overall Survey of the Ocean’s Shores)*, Bangkok, 1997, p.135

<sup>111</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, p.5-6

might be robbers, they might provide protection and peace or they might provide the opposite. Political control, domination and collapse lay behind many sudden shifts in trade routes, and that much of the energy and enterprise of merchants has been spent on finding the cheapest and safest route to circumvent the political powers.”<sup>112</sup>

The rise of Calicut and its decline can be seen as an example of how the rulers play an important role in the development of any city. The Zamorins contributed to the rise of Calicut immensely and helped in maintaining its position in the Indian Ocean trade. They created a suitable environment for trade to flourish and eventually Calicut became an emporium. Even before the arrival of the Europeans, Calicut was a famed port and it was rising in popularity as the eve of their arrival. Lakshmi Subramaniam writes,

“The greater degree of openness littoral societies enjoyed by virtue of their location and history permitted a particular mode of urbanization and accommodated diverse and early cosmopolitan influences. The concentration of infrastructure and investment in coastal centers also gave a definitive shape to the urbanization that the coastal cities supported.”<sup>113</sup>

The environment created did impart a cosmopolitan character to Calicut. We will see more of it in chapter three.

The coming of the Zamorins transformed Calicut and eventually the arrival of the merchants from various places allowed it to flourish as a cosmopolitan and secular space. The Zamorin kept growing stronger due to the help from the Arab merchants

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<sup>112</sup> Niels Steensgaard, ‘Asian Trade Routes: Evidence and Patterns’ in Karl Haellquist (ed.), *Asian Trade Routes*, London: Curzon Press, 1991, p.6

<sup>113</sup> Lakshmi Subramaniam, *Ports, Towns, Cities: A Historical Tour of the Indian Littoral*, p. 12



initially and later from the Marakkar merchants. The Muslim traders were an asset to the Zamorin. The support extended to the Zamorin was crucial in maintaining his authority and consolidating his kingdom. The Muslim merchants also were instrumental in maintaining the policy of free trade as they did not aim for monopolizing the trade. The Zamorins and the traders aimed for mutual benefits and this led to the evolution of a harmonious society. Backed by the traders, the Zamorin was a force to reckon with and this had an effect on the rulers around. Though there existed differences and the desire to remain independent, many of the smaller principalities chose to acknowledge the suzerainty of the Zamorin as he was moderate in his approach to them, once they surrendered to him.<sup>114</sup>

However, the arrival of the European powers definitely led to changes in Calicut.

The arrival of the Europeans increased the demand for commodities which in turn increased the production of commodities in the hinterlands. Pius Malekandathil opines that the trade in spices formed the major chunk of the maritime trade in the first hundred years after the entry of the Europeans in India, so much so that, it could be called the 'century of the spices'. The aim behind the textile trade of the Portuguese private traders was also to procure spices.<sup>115</sup> Pepper production increased substantially.

“Though pepper production increased in the hinterland by 600 per cent, only 3.10 per cent of the total went to Europe for trade, while 15.5 per cent was consumed domestically by the end of the sixteenth century. The remaining pepper of

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<sup>114</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, p.126

Ayyar quotes Zeinuddin, “With regard to the wars of this chieftain, whenever he commenced hostilities against any of the inconsiderable chiefs of Malabar...after subduing them, it was his practice to return some portion of their possessions, provided he had not been irritated beyond measure; and this restitution, although delayed for a long time, he always made in the end, evincing a politic regard for the prejudices and feelings of the people of Malabar.” – pp.125-26

<sup>115</sup> Pius Malekandathil (ed.), *The Indian Ocean in the Making of Early Modern India*, p.20

about 81.4 per cent was transhipped to the markets of the Mughals, Ming China, Saffavid Persia and the Ottomans.”<sup>116</sup>

The intensified trade led to the flow of wealth to the hinterlands leading these areas to become the centers of relative power concentration, resulting in the emergence of several secondary and satellite power units in the hinterland. They were a parallel to the maritime city states of Calicut and Cochin. One such formation was Vadakkenkur, known as the pepper kingdom by the Portuguese and the Dutch with its capital at Thodupuzha. The ruler received 72,000 *reais* from the Portuguese for being their ally and ensuring regular supply of pepper to Cochin for trade.<sup>117</sup> The same amount was given to rulers of Alengad and Diamper and 36,000 *reais* were given to two rulers in Kottayam and Kanjirappally. This aspect of providing monetary incentives was one of the tactics employed by the Portuguese to integrate the distant spice producing hinterlands with the maritime exchange centers.<sup>118</sup>

The monetary incentives also introduced the idea of exchanging money for goods even in the local economy. “The flow of bullions and copper to the hinterland of Kerala as pepper money from the Atlantic exerted a considerable impact on its societal, economic and cultural processes.”<sup>119</sup> The Portuguese trade demanded the import of more precious metals to the Malabar Coast for the minting of coins. Barter was a not a feasible system of exchange as Portuguese did not have enough commodities of exchange. K S Mathew opines that this may have led to the monetization of the economy in Malabar as the King of Calicut did not permit his subordinate rulers to mint money but the supply of cash brought from Portugal and even those struck in Goa were in use in Kerala.<sup>120</sup> The Portuguese officials repeatedly wrote to their King to send more cash to India to facilitate trade.

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<sup>116</sup> Pius Malekandathil (ed.), *The Indian Ocean in the Making of Early Modern India*, pp.21-2

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23

<sup>120</sup> K S Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*, pp.214-5

The arrival of the European powers did more damage than benefit to the trade in Calicut and to the overall political situation prevailing in Kerala at that time. They destroyed the atmosphere of trade in Calicut. The main aim of these powers was to subdue and monopolize the trade in these regions. Albuquerque wrote to the king of Portugal upon the retention of Goa in 1513,

"And I hold it to be free from doubt, that if fortresses be built in Diu and Calicut (as I trust in our Lord they will be), when once they have been well-fortified, if a thousand of the Sultan's ships were to make their way to India, not one of those places could be brought again under his dominion."<sup>121</sup>

They wanted to maximize their profits at the expense of the producers. This was entirely opposite to the policy followed by the Zamorin. The Portuguese resorted to extreme measures in order to achieve their goals. High customs duty was imposed on all the goods arriving or leaving and this in turn resulted in driving away trade to ports that were not subject to Portuguese rule. Thus, several important emporia, which were prime seats of trade were effectually ruined and sank into places of secondary importance, never recovering their commercial supremacy.<sup>122</sup>

Cochin was looking for a chance to break off from the rule of the Zamorin and this dream came true with the arrival of the Portuguese on the scene. The rivalry between the Zamorin and the ruler of Cochin was exploited well to the benefit of the Portuguese and other European powers. The balance of power was seriously affected by the Portuguese trade; the traditional relations between the Zamorin, and the kings of Cochin, Cannanore were substantially altered.<sup>123</sup> And in later years when the Zamorin finally acceded to let the Portuguese have a factory on his territory, the latter chose to side with the Zamorin. Thus, the Portuguese instead of following a policy that benefited all the traders further divided the rulers and sowed seeds of dissent

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<sup>121</sup> F C Danvers, *The Portuguese in India*, p.261

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xxxviii

<sup>123</sup> K S Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*, p.225

among them as the wealth and the support from the Portuguese trade empowered the weak rulers and also led to the rise of new ones.

The Dutch were also not far behind. Their motives are visible from a letter written by the Dutch Governor Jacob Hustaert. The VOC wanted to secure a regular supply of pepper as well as seal off the rest of the market and command self-determined prices. Jacob Hustaert, the Dutch Governor of Ceylon who also commanded the VOC establishments in Malabar till 1669 wrote to his subordinates in March 1664: “Considering that the pepper is the bride around which everything dances, we recommend Your Honours to bend your best efforts to bring great quantities of Malabar pepper every year.... while at the same time you should prevent the indigenes from transporting [it] elsewhere by sea or land in secret.”<sup>124</sup>

The Zamorin Thus, utilized the different European powers for his benefit and encouraged their presence in his territories. We realize that trade was important to the Zamorin as it filled his coffers and hence he did not miss any opportunity to bring traders to his port. The Zamorins, from their advent, had realized that a good control over the trade in Calicut was the key to their supremacy and they utilized the benefits the various European countries offered to them at different times. The Zamorin was one of the important rulers on the Malabar Coast and the Europeans too wanted to please him. Hence when one power was estranged with the ruler, the other tried to exploit the opportunity and make good use of it. Thus, instead of protecting the trade, each wanted to destroy the prospects of the other and want it all for themselves. The Zamorin and the Europeans each had their own motives and we see that in order to achieve their goals they went to extreme limits. The Zamorin wanted supremacy and for this he took the help of the Europeans. Meanwhile the Europeans wanted the trade benefits in Malabar, for which they sided with one ruler after the other, whoever served their purposes.

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<sup>124</sup> Mark Vink, ‘The Dutch East India Company and the Pepper Trade Between Kerala and Tamilnad, 1663-1795: A Geo-Historical Analysis’, p.274

Thus, Calicut and its character did change drastically due to the trade. The society also experienced many changes and this will be dealt in the third chapter. Trade before the arrival of the Europeans was free and was not controlled by any organization. All traders were welcome and whoever had the resources could buy and exchange commodities. Commodity flows also were not restricted as monopoly over a commodity was unheard of. Rulers did try to conquer the rich hinterlands but only for the benefit of the trade and did not lay any terms as to who can partake of it. Traders from far and wide came and traded in the products Calicut could offer. However, the arrival of the Europeans changed the scene as they wanted to control the trade for themselves. However, their attempt to monopolize the trade was not successful as the Zamorin and the traders fought back. “Not only did cities accommodate merchants of diverse ethnicities and faiths, these merchants enjoyed a special relationship with local rulers, some of whom, like the Zamorin of Calicut, were even prepared to take up arms for them when threatened by external aggression.”<sup>125</sup> Thus, the role of the Zamorins in the development of Calicut as a city is vital and it is interesting to note the various mechanisms he adopted as the ruler to maintain Calicut as a city with a difference and also its supremacy.

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<sup>125</sup> Lakshmi Subramaniam, *Ports, Towns, Cities: A Historical Tour of the Indian Littoral*, p.14

## CHAPTER II

### Cultural Production in Calicut

The study of the urbanization in Calicut has to be undertaken from various angles and having looked at how trade, an external as well as an obvious factor that conferred urban characteristics, we saw how the Zamorin played a pivotal role. The power and authority wielded by the Zamorin was extensive and it in turn contributed to the unleashing of forces that led to the development of Calicut. Calicut was an obscure strip of land but the determination of the Zamorins to make it a centre of worldwide importance had many implications. While extensive political authority was wielded by the Zamorin, cultural tools were also used to legitimize his rule. Political conquest was necessary to expand and enlarge a territory but subsequent subordination was possible only through rituals and practices that were given a royal colour and tone in terms of patronage, Thus, ensuring the hold the over conquered territories. The Zamorin had the wealth and the resources to patronize cultural institutions from the trade in Calicut. The wealth in his coffers was spent on cultural endeavours that would in turn showcase his power Thus, legitimizing his authority. This chapter will look at the various cultural tools that the Zamorin employed to legitimize his authority and how his patronage to poets and scholars created ripples that would eventually lead not just Calicut but Kerala as a whole into showcasing characteristics of early modernity. The Zamorin's need to maintain their political authority had effects that transcended their political ambitions and set the stage for the development of an exquisite culture.

To begin with, it is necessary to define what culture is. The definition of 'culture' has evolved from its general usage as a:

‘term for referring to the visual arts, literature, philosophy,  
science and music to denote the cultivated practices of

people which in a broad sense refers to the aggregate of morals, normative values, conventions, customs, rituals, laws, beliefs, arts and knowledge of all aspects of human life.<sup>1</sup>

The cultural endeavours of the Zamorin varied widely from the religious theatrical/performative ones to the highly sophisticated literary pursuits. Ceremonial elaborations and ritual details got added to festivities and commemorations, as the Zamorin grew in power and wealth.

Among the ceremonies performed, the *Mamankam* celebrated every twelve years occupied a place of great importance. ‘The *Tai-puyam* was another festival celebrated in 12 years and sometimes these were performed even twice in 12 years’ writes Krishna Ayyar. Other ceremonies included the *Tiruvantavali* (the funeral ceremonies of the Zamorin’s predecessor), the *Ariyittuvalcha* (inauguration of the reign of the new Zamorin on a grand scale), *Tulabharam* (ceremony of weighing against gold and silver), *Mriyujayajapams* (a ceremony to propitiate Shiva and ward off misfortunes), *Vishu*, *Attacchumayam*, *Onam*, *Revati Pattattanam* and *Tirunal* (birthday of the Zamorin).<sup>2</sup> All these ceremonies were held on a large scale entailing a great deal of expenditure. By spending lavishly for these celebrations and festivities, the ruler manifested his wealth and grandeur and in this process, spending wealth was developed as a mechanism to assert superiority in the region. However, the role played by *Mamankam* in the making of early modern Kerala is of major importance and hence we will concentrate on it.

### **2.1. The *Mamankam***

The major event of cultural production that comes to mind in relation to the Zamorins is the *Mamankam*. Even today, events of great grandeur are described as *Mamankam* by elders and the term is used even in newspaper articles. The relevance of the term

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<sup>1</sup> V V Haridas, *Zamorins And the Political Culture of Medieval Kerala*, 2016, p.3

<sup>2</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, p.17

even in present day Kerala denotes the significance the ceremony had, for the people of Kerala and its influence. While many may not know what *Mamankam* actually was like, the term's usage in modern day signifies that it is used to describe events and festivities on a grand scale. It is therefore not a wonder that the Zamorin wanted to be the ruler and assert his superior political position by the way he organized the *Mamankam*. Having Calicut and its trade under his control, the power to organize *Mamankam* and preside over its rituals only augmented the Zamorin's authority as it showcased his leadership skills as well as his power and wealth.

The study of *Mamankam* is significant as, in the present day; a festival involves the coming together of people of different walks of life. Since *Mamankam* was a pan-Kerala festival, it involved the rulers, their subordinates, soldiers, traders, religious functionaries, local inhabitants and many more such categories of people. The coming together of so many on such a large scale activated the market mechanisms as many demands had to be met in terms of the needs of the festival and of those assembled. It throws light into the interactions within the kingdom and how they contributed to the building of Calicut.

*Mamankam* was the name given to the twelve-yearly festival celebrated in Tirunavaya, on the banks of the river Bharatapuzha. It was called *Mamankam*, a derivation of *Mahamagham* as it was held in the year called *Mahamagha* of the *Saka* calendar. It was celebrated for 28 days in the Malayalam months of *Makaram* (corresponds to January- February) and *Kumbham* (February-March).<sup>3</sup> It was believed that during this period the goddess Ganga herself descended into the Bharatapuzha. Thus, making it as holy as the Ganges.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Pius Malekandathil, 'Rubrics of Power and Trade in Calicut', p. 5

<sup>4</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, p.92



## 2.2. Origins of *Mamankam*

The origins of this festival are obscure and hence it is difficult to trace. Historians have had varying views. According to the *Keralolpatti*, when the Cheraman Perumal divided his territory, the right to Tirunavaya sand bank and right to conduct the *Mamankam* festival was given to Valluvakonathiri. The Tirumandamkunnu Bhagavathi was also assigned to him as his guardian deity.<sup>5</sup> N M Namboothiri, is of the opinion that this was a trade festival based on riverine trade. He also assigns this event to be the state festival of medieval Kerala. The origin maybe attributed to trade but its significance lies in the role it played in the political scenario in Kerala.<sup>6</sup> Kilimanoor Varma writes, “In its origin the festival was only of religious importance, being in honour of Mahavishnu, as in other places in India where it is still in vogue. While in other places the festival remained purely a religious affair, it developed political significance in Kerala.”<sup>7</sup> K M Panikkar writes that the *Mamankam* was one of the great festivals in Kerala and that it was initially an assembly held for the election of an emperor in Kerala and that later it was controlled by the Zamorin.<sup>8</sup> P.C.M Raja opines that this festival originated as a religious ceremony around which many aspects of culture, show of power and economy began to develop. It was the perfect occasion for the Zamorin to show off his greatness.<sup>9</sup>

About the festival being named *Mamankam* and its origins, there are different views. According to Logan, it meant a big sacrifice.<sup>10</sup> Padmanabha Menon also holds the same view.<sup>11</sup> Both are wrong in their idea of *Mamankam* as it is drawn from the record of Alexander Hamilton who wrote a record of the *Mamankam* based on hearsay. Krishna Ayyar states that it originated from the word *Mahamagham*.<sup>12</sup> “The

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<sup>5</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, p.93

<sup>6</sup> V V Haridas, *Mamankavum Chaverum*, Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society Ltd, 2015, p.9

<sup>7</sup> N M Namboothiri, *Mamankam Rekhakal*, p. 217

<sup>8</sup> K M Panikkar, *A History of Kerala: 1498-1801*, Annamalainagar: Annamalainagar University p.212

<sup>9</sup> PCM Raja, *Mamankavum Samuthiriyum*, Calicut: Modern Printing Press, p.1982, p.58

<sup>10</sup> William Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. 1, p.163

<sup>11</sup> Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol II, p.404

<sup>12</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut* p.92

most probable derivation is from *maghamakam*, the *makam* (*magha*) asterism in the month of *Magha*, the day on which the thirty-one days festival came to an end.”<sup>13</sup>

### 2.3. Site of the *Mamankam*

The banks of the river Perar, also called Bharatapuzha has been the site of the famed *Mamankam*. The exact location is Tirunavaye, ten miles up the river where exists a famous Vishnu temple. “Tirumanakai Alvar and Nammalvar of the ninth-tenth century have mentioned it among the important Vishnu temples.”<sup>14</sup> It is located between the Palghat Gap and Ponnani harbour and this made it an important location for trade. On both the sides of the river there were numerous other shrines for Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and minor deities. Temples dedicated to Brahma are rare and Tirunavaye boasts of being the location of one such shrine in the whole of India.

In Tirunavaye, The Zamorin had his palace at Vakayur. The palace, Navamukunda temple and Manittara (upper platform on the river Bharatapuzha) in Tirunavaye formed the venue of the *Mamankam*, which is located at the centre of a chain of *kavus* (sacred shrines belonging to non-Brahmanical segments) on either side of the river. These *kavus* along with the Brahmanical temples organized many cyclical festal celebrations that were celebrated on a monthly or annual basis based on the position of the stars and this in turn would create avenues for increased production of agricultural commodities and artisanal activities.<sup>15</sup> The Zamorin himself patronized these celebrations in at least 150 *kavus* in Calicut, Kottakal, Koduvayur, Ponnani and Ottapalam wherein he met the needs of the shrines.<sup>16</sup> This interest in the minute workings of the smaller shrines in the interior regions showcases the importance these areas had for the Zamorin. The patronage may have been offered with the view of familiarizing him with the common people who were otherwise removed from the main area of his jurisdiction. The Zamorin resided in his palace in Vakayur during the

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<sup>13</sup> V V Haridas. *Zamorins And the Political Culture of Medieval Kerala*, p.264

<sup>14</sup> MGS Narayanan, *Calicut: The City of Truth Revisited*, p.154

<sup>15</sup> N M Namboothiri, *Mamankam Rekhakal*, pp 30-1

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45

time of the *Mamankam*. This step might also have been taken with the idea of popularizing himself with the people and ensuring their allegiance. The Zamorin by taking care of these nitigrities, made way for building an image of himself that was all powerful, all pervading, that from the chieftains to the common man, all acknowledged him as their sovereign and pledged their loyalty to him.

#### **2.4. Zamorin's Hold over the *Mamankam***

The right to conduct the *Mamankam* did not originally belong to the Zamorin. It belonged to the Valluvakonathiri, the ruler of Valluvanad. He was the *Rakshapurushan* of the *Mamankam* and this right was given to him by the Cheraman Perumal. The duty of the *Rakshapurushan* or protector of the *Mamankam* was to fix the flag staff and inaugurate the festival while seeing to the fact that the festival was celebrated without any interruption.<sup>17</sup> The Zamorin wanted to be the protector of the *Mamankam* as the title brought along with it many privileges and superior political status. While it brought about the idea of a pan-Kerala leadership, as the rulers subdued were to send flags of fealty; it also brought about the benefit of accessing the products found in this area. Since the site was near a river, it can be imagined that the land was very productive and hence was suitable for cultivation unlike the land around the city of Calicut which being unsuitable for cultivation was used for salt panning. Hence possessing these hinterland areas and subduing the rulers in these interiors was of great concern to the Zamorin.

MGS Narayanan writes,

"Within about two centuries after the foundation of Calicut, the Zamorin had extended his territory in all directions. He had already driven away the Porlathiri to Kadathanad and subjugated Polanad.... his next attempt was to capture Tirunavaye in the south, which was included in the territory of the Valluvanad Raja. This step might have been prompted by various interests. Ponnani at the mouth of

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<sup>17</sup>K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, p.91

the river Perar was a natural harbour and could have been a rival to Calicut in trade. Small vessels could go from Ponnani upto Tirunavaye through the river and Tirunavaye was the venue of a grand twelve-yearly assembly called *Mamankam*.<sup>18</sup>

According to the *Keralolpatti*, the proposal to become the *Rakshapurushan* of the *Mamankam* was suggested to the Zamorin by the *Kozhikkottu Koya*. The *Koya* had gone to witness the *Mamankam* and recounted it to his master, the Zamorin and concluded by saying “all these places are destined to fall into our hands.”<sup>19</sup> The Zamorin cited his inability to undertake the project but the *Koya* offered to support the Zamorin in his expedition. He said, “If your Majesty wishes to have this dignity (of protecting and conducting the *Mamankam* festival), Your Majesty’s servant will secure it by force.”<sup>20</sup> The Zamorin agreed to his proposition and promised him the privilege to stand on his side during the festival. The *Koya* undertook the expedition and won Tirunavaye for the Zamorin along with the rights and dignities connected with the temple and its festival.<sup>21</sup> He made a display of the fire works known as *Kampaveti* and *Kalpalaka*.<sup>22</sup> The Zamorin kept his word and permitted him to stand on his side on the grand platform known as the Nilapadutara at Vakayur at the time of the festival.<sup>23</sup> He was also awarded the title of *Shah Bunder Koya* which meant he was the chief officer of the port of Calicut. Ayyar writes, “The *Koya* was given all the privileges and dignities of a Nair chief, jurisdiction over all the Muhammadans in the bazaar, right to collect from the brokers at the rate of ten *fanams* for every foreign ship that came to Calicut and levy a poll tax of 16 *fanams* at Pantarakkatavu and 12 *fanams* at Beypore.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, we see that trade privileges were handed over to the *Koya* and this indicates how the various expansion projects of the Zamorin was linked with gaining more benefits for the trade at Calicut. We also see how the Zamorin richly rewarded his supporters Thus, ensuring their loyalty and support to him further.

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<sup>18</sup> M G S Narayanan, *Calicut: The City of Truth Revisited*, p. 69.

<sup>19</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, p.94

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.94

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.95

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95

<sup>23</sup> MGS Narayanan, *Calicut: The City of Truth Revisited*, p.155

<sup>24</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, p.103

Another version says that the *Koya* tricked the ruler of Valluvanadu into handing over the rights of the *Mamankam* to the Zamorin. Praising the ruler immensely, the *Koya* challenged him to showcase the fact that no one had the courage to kill him while he stood on the platform at Vakayur and added that, if anyone succeeded, the privilege to conduct the *Mamankam* would be theirs. The ruler blindly accepted his challenge and walked into his own grave.<sup>25</sup> Ever since, the rulers of Valluvanadu, sent suicide squads known as *chavers* to avenge the death of their master and the stripping of his right to conduct the *Mamankam*.

Krishna Ayyar opines that the Zamorin was anyway bound to conquer Tirunavaye and he did not need any external suggestions.<sup>26</sup> Ponnani was situated on the coast of the Bharatapuzha which contributed in a major way in transportation and communication and hence Tirunavaye in the interior was also important.<sup>27</sup> The reason according to him was the invasion of Tirumanasserinad. This territory lay adjacent to the territories of the rulers of Valluvanadu and Cochin and the rulers joined forces against the ruler of Tirumanasserinad. This *nadu* consisted of 146 *desams* to the south of the river Perar, extending to the sea coast as far as the harbour town of Ponnani and the ruler promised to cede Ponnani to the Zamorin in return for his help against the other rulers.<sup>28</sup> The Zamorin took control of Tirumanasseri and Ponnani and occupied Tirunavaye. It was a difficult contest and the Zamorin had to appeal to the family deity of the Valluvanad kings to finally gain victory.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the Zamorin acquired the right to be the protector of the *Mamankam*.

All those who assisted the Zamorin in the great victory were honoured. The rulers who supported him were given the privilege to be in charge of the different aspects

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<sup>25</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, pp 95-96

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.96

<sup>28</sup> MGS Narayanan, *Calicut: The City of Truth Revisited*, p.154.

<sup>29</sup> "The Zamorins....carried *pallimaradi* at the head of their army when they marched against the Vellatri (Valluvakonathiri), because this ritual palladium visualized the presence of goddess Tirumandhamkунnu Bhagavati which would assure them victory over the enemy."- Binu J Mailaprambil, *Lords of the Sea*, Leiden: Brill, 2012, p.31

related to the celebration of the *Mamankam*. The ruler of Tirumanasseri was given the right to collect a small fee from merchants who set up their booths on the river bed during the festival. The ruler of Cranganore was given the privilege of supervising the feeding of the Brahmins during the festival.<sup>30</sup> We can infer from the privilege given to the ruler of Tirumanasseri that the coming together of so many people for the festival created the need for markets to provide various items.

The description on *Mamankam* is incomplete without the *Chaver* squad. They were the royal bodyguards of the Valluvanad ruler who vowed to kill the Zamorin in order to avenge the death of their Master. Every time the *Mamankam* was celebrated, a group of *chavers* set out to fulfill their purpose. The security around the Zamorin was enhanced in the days of the *Mamankam* in the wake of the knowledge that the *chavers* would strike. Only in 1683 did one of the *chavers* succeed in reaching the platform where the Zamorin stood but the king escaped misfortune. The *chavers* died in battle with the Zamorin's forces at the *Mamankam*. The *chavers* have been remembered for their valour, bravery and sacrifice in poems and songs of medieval times. Two folk songs on *Chaver* are the *Changazhi Nambiyar Pattu* and the *Kandar Menon Pattu*. Changazhi Nambiyar and Kandar Menon were the names of the leaders of the *chaver* squads that went to Tirunavaye to kill the Zamorin and to secure for the ruler of Valluvanadu the right to preside over *Mamankam*.

Thus, though the *Mamankam* was an occasion for the Zamorin to indicate his superiority and power it was also a time of extreme vigilance and carefulness as the *chavers* could attack and kill him if there was even a slight breach in his security. The *chavers* had to be identified among such a great crowd and they had to be countered. While the Zamorin started out from Ponnani for Tirunavaya, the *chavers* also moved through a parallel route.<sup>31</sup> Since it was not an organized attack, the Zamorin and his soldiers had to be extremely vigilant to identify these trained individuals.

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<sup>30</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, p.103

<sup>31</sup> Pius Malekandathil, 'Rubrics of Power and Trade in Calicut', p.6

## 2.5. Preparation for *Mamankam*

The festival began with the construction of temporary palaces for the Zamorin and the Eralpad (the second prince) at Vakayur Trikkavil.<sup>32</sup> A sum of 8382 ½ *panams* were given from the royal treasury for the work.<sup>33</sup> The Urali Nairs are the ones who are in charge of the building of the palace. An auspicious date is chosen by the royal astrologer for cutting the wood that was to be used for building. The articles needed for the celebration are brought by boats and the tolls are abolished. Rice, guns, gun powder etc are transported to Tirunavaye. Meanwhile palaces, residences, ceremonial platform etc are constructed. The walls are whitewashed and the picture of the Bhadrakaali and other deities are painted.<sup>34</sup> A flurry of activities followed as the dates drew closer- shields were inlaid with gold and silver, large quantities of gold jewelry, gold trappings for the elephant and royal insignia were transported to Vakayur from Ponnani, ships were constructed for a mock fight etc.<sup>35</sup>

## 2.6. The Proceedings of the *Mamankam*

The Zamorin used to arrive at Tirunavaye three days before the beginning of the festivities. The festival used to begin on the day of the *Puyam* asterism wherein the Zamorin led a procession to the platform, which he ascended and saluted the deity. The Eralpad and the Tirumanasseri ruler stood on a platform on the opposite river bank and saluted the deity. This went on until the twentieth day, on which fell the *Revati* asterism wherein the Zamorin presented himself in complete grandeur on account of his clothing and ornaments, mounted an elephant decked in jewellery, proceeded to Tirunavaye, worshipped the deity and returned to the Vakayur palace. Each time the Zamorin ascended the platform; he held a sword in his hand and shook it as a matter of challenge against all adversaries.<sup>36</sup> On the twenty seventh day, the Zamorin adorned himself and went with the royal insignia and paraphernalia to the

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<sup>32</sup> MGS Narayanan, *Calicut: The City of Truth Revisited*, p. 169

<sup>33</sup> V V Haridas, *Zamorins And the Political Culture of Medieval Kerala*, p.267

<sup>34</sup> MGS Narayanan, *Calicut: The City of Truth Revisited*, p.169

<sup>35</sup> V V Haridas, *Zamorins And the Political Culture of Medieval Kerala*, p.270

<sup>36</sup> MGS Narayanan, *Calicut: The City of Truth Revisited*, p.171

*mannitara*. The mock fight between the ships was held on this day. This went on for three more days and the only difference was the person standing on the platform on the opposite bank.<sup>37</sup> Rulers or chieftains who came under the Zamorin were given the privilege to grace the platform on different days. The *Mamankam* came to an end on the day of *Makam*. On this day the Eralpad and the Tirumanasseri chief joined the Zamorin on the main platform at his right hand side while the *Koya* occupied the left side.<sup>38</sup> Then the Zamorin travelled back to Ponnani.

## 2.7. Significance of the *Mamankam*

Even though the *Mamankam* was a cultural addition, it actually set forth in motion the triggers for the growth of markets and increased production of commodities. “During the period when the *Mamankam* was celebrated, the banks of the Bharatapuzha served as a stage for ritual performance, political displays and market transactions.”<sup>39</sup> The festival created the stage for market forces to develop even in the interiors. The interiors produced many commodities and the festival might have even provided an arena to exhibit commodities and might have also initiated the need for certain commodities. This could have even let in forces of urbanity in these areas which were otherwise cut off from much outside contact. It was an occasion for people from different backgrounds to congregate and mingle with each other.

The title of the *Rakshapurushan* was a feather in the cap for the Zamorin. This was his opportunity to showcase on a grand scale his authority and power. V V Haridas writes, “While the Zamorin paid obeisance to the deity, the junior princes, locality chiefs, local magnates etc., paid their obeisance to him. The deity and the Zamorin retained a pivotal role in the entire process, giving the king and the royalty a new perspective.”<sup>40</sup> Hence we see that even in later years, even when the Zamorins were not enjoying much power, the *Mamankam* was still held. It was not just another

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<sup>37</sup> V V Haridas, *Zamorins And the Political Culture of Medieval Kerala*, p.272

<sup>38</sup> MGS Narayanan, *Calicut: The City of Truth Revisited* ,p.172

<sup>39</sup> Pius Malekandathil, ‘Rubrics of Power and Trade in Calicut’, p.4

<sup>40</sup> VV Haridas, *Zamorins And the Political Culture of Medieval Kerala*, p.276



festival but it occupied a place of significance for the Zamorin and Calicut. The various ceremonies were headed by different royal functionaries and these privileges were hereditary. The superiority over the other rulers, on account of being the protector of the *Mamankam*, fuelled his ambition for more territories and the need to maintain his sovereignty. When the invitation for attending the *Mamankam* was received, the rulers and chieftains who were under the authority of the Zamorin sent tribute and flags of fealty. Thus, contributing to the wealth of the Zamorin.<sup>41</sup> N M Namboothiri is of the opinion that the presence of the palace at Vakayur and the Navamukunda temple indicated the merging of political authority and *bhakti* at the *Mamankam* site which was a powerful force to stimulate the region for the production of commodities.<sup>42</sup>

Many entertainment activities were performed such as *Krishnanattam* (“a theatre art representing the story of Krishna through vocal and percussive music, costumes and make up, dance, mime, facial expressions and hand gestures”<sup>43</sup>), *Ramanattam* (based on the story of Rama), *Koothu*, *Patakam* (a traditional solo exposition of epic and Puranic stories) and *Kutiyattam*.<sup>44</sup> The *Mamankam* provided a stage to perform these cultural creations and hence it motivated many poets to write. An impetus to the production of culture was given by the Zamorin as we will see in the next section. One of the important works written on the *Mamankam* is the *Mamanakam pattu*. The author is Katancheri Namboothiri, a companion of the Zamorin of Calicut. “The description of Calicut is interesting. There is a detailed description of the ceremonies and procedures, associated with the *Mamankam* festival.”<sup>45</sup>

Early glimpses of modernity can be witnessed if we read between the lines. Many objectives were being fulfilled in the celebration of this festival, once in twelve years. It meant the periodic renewal of allegiance to the Zamorin for the rulers who came under him, increased production and trade for the producers of commodities in the

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<sup>41</sup> MGS Narayanan, *Calicut: The City of Truth Revisited*, p.156

<sup>42</sup> N M Namboothiri, *Mamankam Rekhakal*, p.36

<sup>43</sup> V V Haridas, *Zamorins And the Political Culture of Medieval Kerala*, p.232

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.275

<sup>45</sup> K M George, *A Survey of Malayalam Literature*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1968, p.82

interior regions, a time to intermingle and forge new bonds and alliances even among the traders and merchants and a scene for early forces of urbanity to trigger in due to the inflow and mixing of people from various backgrounds.

## 2.8 Literature and Learning

The Zamorins paid attention to the development of culture. Among the rulers, the Zamorins Manavikrama (1466-1471), Manaveda (1655-58) and Bharani Tirunal are remembered for their contribution to patronizing culture. Many verses were composed in the praise of the Zamorin. Sreedhara Menon writes,

“Calicut under the Zamorins attained fame as a centre of Sanskrit learning and studies all over South India. The annual assembly of scholars known as *Revati Pattathanam* which was held here under the patronage of the Zamorins attracted scholars from all parts of Kerala and outside. A galaxy of eighteen celebrated royal poets known as the *Patinettara Kavikal* lived at Calicut in the reign of the Bharani Tirunal Manavikrama (1466-71), the famous Zamorin and they made their inestimable contribution to Sanskrit learning and studies.”<sup>46</sup>

During the reign of the Zamorin Manavikrama, an assembly of poets called *Patinettara Kavikal* existed. According to V V Haridas, it is an ‘invented tradition’ that came up at a later date as no contemporary works mention it. It is an attempt to glorify their rule.<sup>47</sup> The main contention is the fact that its difficult to trace which Zamorins were patrons and which were not as all the Zamorins went by one of the three titles- Manavikraman, Manavedan and Virarayan.<sup>48</sup> However, one cannot disprove the fact that the Zamorins did patronize the development of literature. Hence

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<sup>46</sup> A Sreedhara Menon, *Social and Cultural History of Kerala*, New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1979, p.295

<sup>47</sup> V V Haridas, *Zamorins And the Political Culture of Medieval Kerala* ,p.245

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p.243

without attributing the name of the Zamorin, I proceed with the famous works produced during the rule of the Zamorins.

A new literary language called *Manipravalam* developed in Kerala during the ninth to the twelfth centuries which was a combination of Malayalam and Sanskrit words. The author of the famous treatise *Lilatilakam* emphasizing the ideal relationship between Malayalam and Sanskrit says that “the best type of *Manipravalam* should be a necklace of ruby (*mani*), i.e., Malayalam and coral (*pravalam*), i.e., Sanskrit.”<sup>49</sup> It was not just the usage of choice words from each language that lent elegance and magnanimity to this new language but even the grammars from both the languages were mixed harmoniously.<sup>50</sup>

The *Manipravalam* works can be categorized into two broad divisions namely *Champus* and *Sandesha Kavyas*. The famous *Champus* written in the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries are the *Unniachicharitam*, *Unnichirutevicharitam* and *Unniyaticharitam*.<sup>51</sup> The notable *Sandesha Kavyas* are *Unnunili Sandesham* and *Kokasandesha*. They are message poems modeling the *Meghaduta* of Kalidasa.<sup>52</sup>

The fifteenth and sixteenth century witnessed a new phase in the evolution of Malayalam literature as the language liberated itself from the influence of Tamil and assimilated the influence of Sanskrit.<sup>53</sup> This is observed from the language and style of the later *Champus* as it is reminiscent of modern Malayalam and also shows a perceptible improvement in poetic quality.<sup>54</sup> We shall discuss some of the literary pieces during this period, out of which some might have been produced outside, while a good many of them could have been written under the patronage of the Zamorin or within the larger cultural ambit of Calicut, whose dynamics got propelled from Calicut’s trade and religiosity.

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<sup>49</sup> A Sreedhara Menon, *Social and Cultural History of Kerala*, p.336

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p.336

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.336

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.336

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.337

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p.337

### 2.8.1 *Sandesha Kavyas*

*Sandesha kavyas* have been composed in various Indian languages. In Kerala, these poems have been written in Sanskrit, *Manipravalam* and Malayalam. Its basic structure is that the hero, separated from his beloved, sends a message to her through a messenger. These poems throw light on the history and geography of the period in which they were composed. Facts and imagination are blended together and the poems are divided into two parts- *Poorva sandesha* and *Utthana sandesha*. In the first part, the context, the route, and the important places on the way are described while the second part contains a description of the heroine and her charms and the actual message is communicated.<sup>55</sup>

#### A. *Unnunili Sandesham*

One of the most important *sandesha kavyas*, the *Unnunili Sandesham* occupies a prime place in Malayalam literature. The poem skillfully describes the beauty of Kerala. It the story of Unnunili and her unnamed hero, who on being abducted and dropped off in Trivandrum sends across a message to his lover. He describes the route to his messenger and therein the temples, markets, rivers and rivulets from Trivandrum to Kaduthuruthy are described.<sup>56</sup> In the poem, dawn is described Thus,

“The cock crew, like the trumpet of cupid to mark his retreat;  
The clusters of stars strewn about in the sky turned pale like flakes of maize  
The sun and moon posed as if they were cymbals of the maid of dawn  
And beetles shot up like smoke from the hollows of lotus flowers.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> K M George, *A Survey of Malayalam Literature*, p.51

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53

The description fills one with awe and wonder. The skills of the poets in medieval times were much beyond what we can imagine. It is a combination of good vocabulary and artistic skill.

### **B. Kokasandesham**

This was written after the *Unnunili sandesham* and only some *slokas* survive. The *Kokasandesham* mentions the Zamorins of Calicut and the rulers of Cochin. It was written by Uddanta Sastrikal, a famed poet in the court of the Zamorin.

### **2.8.2. Champus**

The *champu* is a literary genre where prose and verse are interspersed. In Sanskrit it is defined as ‘*gadya padya mayam kavyamchampoorithyabhidheeyathe*’<sup>58</sup> Mixing both allows the writer to utilize the best of both forms, However, it also needs great skill and expertise to marry prose and verse and bring out a classic work in literature. Herein lies the greatness of the authors who wrote the *champus* in the medieval times. The style of writing *champus* also evolved as initially the primary characters were courtesans, However, later this style of writing was adopted even for devotional themes. “Initially *puranas* and epics were not used as source material and most of these were outpourings of the heart. The aim of life for them was to have full enjoyment of the pleasures of life.”<sup>59</sup> Hence the heroines are danseuses and unmarried. However, we see later *champus* exploring devotional themes. Authors composed both in Sanskrit and in Malayalam. The difference with the Malayalam *champus* was that they were not expected to completely adhere to the rules of *Manipravalam* though Sanskrit words with Sanskrit terminations are accepted to a limited extent and they are called *bhasha champus*, Thus, distinguishing them from the *Manipravalam champu*.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> K M George, *A Survey of Malayalam Literature*, p.86

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.86

*Unniachicharitam*, *Unnichirutevicharitam* and *Unniyaticharitam* are all based on beautiful heroines namely Unniyachi, Unnichirutevi and Unniyati. It describes the beauty of these heroines and how scores of people gathered to catch a glimpse of them. These heroines were dancers and here's how Unniyati was described:

“Sweet tresses which caressed her feet  
The crooked curls,  
The forehead with the beautiful *tilak*  
The eye brows adept in *abhinaya*  
And eyes dancing beautifully”<sup>61</sup>

These works describe the women with a brilliant imagination using exquisite words and phrases and herein lies the richness of these works. These literary contributions are a marvel and one cannot help but admire the elegance with which the dancers are described and the choice of words used. The writers were indeed extremely skilled and had a great command over the language which led to the birth of these beautiful texts.

### **2.8.2.1 Punam Namboothiri**

From the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, many of the best known *champus* were written. The most famous of the later *Champus* is the *Ramayana Champu* written by Punam Namboothiri, one of the eighteen celebrated royal poets (*patinettara kavikal*) who flourished in the court of Manavikrama (1466-71), the Zamorin of Calicut. Compared to the works of other Manipravalam poets, this work explores a different theme. The early *Champus* describes *devadasis* or courtesans whereas this work has a Puranic theme consisting of twenty *prabandhas*, written in an

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<sup>61</sup> K M George, *A Survey of Malayalam Literature*, p. 48

inimitable style sparkling with humour.<sup>62</sup> Another work of Punam is the *Bharata Champu*.

### **A. Ramayana Champu**

*Ramayana Champu* contains stories from the birth of Ravana till the ascension of Sri Rama. The nine sentiments (*navarasas*) are prevalent throughout the text. “The heroic sentiment dominates in *Ravanodhbhavam* and *Ravana vijayam*, the comic or ridiculous (*hasyam*) in *Udyana pravesam*, the erotic (*sringara*) in *Pattabhishekham*, compassion (*karunam*) in *Sitaparithyagam*, and devotion (*bhakti*) in *Sriramavataram* and *Swargarohanam*.”<sup>63</sup>

Moonlight is Thus, described:

“Bright camphor sprinkled on the clarity of ambrosia

The smile of the three worlds,

The ocean of milk in tide,

A whitewash of the sacred ash,

The moonlight, cool and beautiful,

Captured the *rakshasas* hearts.”<sup>64</sup>

### **B. Bharatha Champu**

This work has also been composed by Punam Namboothiri. It is divided into ten sections- *Panhaliwayamvaram*, *Khandavadaham*, *Kiratham*, *Kichakavadham*, *Gograhanam*, *Udyogam*, *Duthavakyam*, *Jayadrathavadham*, *Bharata Yuddham* and *Aswamedham*.<sup>65</sup> In comparison with the *Ramayana Champu*, the *Bharatha Champu*

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<sup>62</sup> A Sreedhara Menon, *Social and Cultural History of Kerala*, p.337

<sup>63</sup> K M George, *A Survey of Malayalam Literature*, p.88

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89

has more Sanskrit words and some scholars are of the opinion that the latter was composed first.<sup>66</sup>

A well known *sloka* praising the Zamorin of Calicut is part of this monumental work. It is roughly translated as:

“O King! You are a garden where the bees of Lakshmi’s glances rove.  
You are a love-god for beautiful women; a midday sun for darkness, the  
enemy; and a beauty mark on the brow of the earth. May this mark not  
be washed away till, alas! this Earth is drowned in the Final Flood.”<sup>67</sup>

We see how highly the poet has raised his patron. He is described as the light in the darkness which indicates him being a leader, a guide. The words are used so artistically that one cannot but marvel at the skill of the poet. The metaphors used to compare the king have much meaning and aren’t simply words thrown in together. They are concocted together to imply his greatness and his superiority.

The *Kailasa* mountain is thus, described:

“Like the falcon of fame,  
Like a sheaf of moonlight beams  
Like the ashes after the Last Fire  
Like the waters of the Ganga rising high...”<sup>68</sup>

### **2.8.2. Literary Production outside the Court**

Many works were written by poets outside the court of the Zamorin and they were the pioneers of the Bhakti movement in Kerala in the medieval times. They wrote the classical texts with new interpretations and with the aim to help the common man understand the philosophies contained in the Vedic texts. Their main aim was to help

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<sup>66</sup> K M George, *A Survey of Malayalam Literature*, p. 90

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.90



even laymen to understand that *bhakti* (devotion) could be their portion too. Two names are of importance in this context and they are Poonthanam and Thunchathu Ezhuthachan.

Their poems encouraged the people to overcome the difficult situations they were facing. They used their abilities and resources to create awareness among the people about the need to live a holy life as it was short and death was inevitable come and hence to end their evil ways. Let us take a look at their writings.

### **A. Poonthanam (1547-1640)**

**Poonthanam** holds a prime position in contributing to the devotional literature of Kerala. His poetry was written for the benefit of the common man and was unlike the erudite poetry written by the high caste poets in order to please the gods. It was not sanskritised as was the fashion in the day.<sup>69</sup> He wrote the *Jnanappana* which was a composition unto the Lord of Guruvayoor. It communicates “simply the essence of the Vedas and exudes total and powerful *bhakti*, which is the essence of one’s spirituality and perseverance to attain the grace of God.”<sup>70</sup> Gopi Kottoor writes, “*Jnanappana* is unmatched for its eloquence, the lofty grandeur of its religious philosophy, and its ambience that crystallizes in a sort of divine bonsai, the infinite and the unlimited. Yet no Vedic bud, leaf or flower has been lost. It is all there, bloom and fruit et al, in simple, pristine beauty.”<sup>71</sup> Other well-known compositions by him are *Sri Krishna Karnamritam* and *Santhanagopalam*. The former describes Krishna in his various moods whereas the latter is the story of Arjuna attempting to jump into the fire and Krishna saving him.<sup>72</sup> Both the works are rich in devotional sentiment.

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<sup>69</sup> Gopi Kottoor, *Poonthanam’s Hymns: The Fountain of God*, Calcutta: Writer’s Workshop, 2002, p.8 Poonthanam desired to show his work, the *Jnanappana*, to Melpathur Bhattathiri, the famed scholar poet who was living near the Guruvayoor temple. Melpathur however refused to read Poonthanam’s humble work and insulted him for having written it without any ornamentation of Sanskrit, in a simple style. Poonthanam was dejected but it is said that the voice of the Lord himself was then heard saying “I like the *Bhakti* of Poonthanam to the *vibhakti* (higher learning) of Melpathur”. The scholar then realized the true worth of *Jnanappana* and the folly of his pride.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10

<sup>72</sup> K M George, *A Survey of Malayalam Literature*, p.136

The main idea of the *bhakti* movement was to make the common people realize that devotion is not only for the higher castes or for men of great learning. Poonthanam's simple language and examples make it easier for the common man to understand the tough philosophy in the Vedas and to know how to attain nearness to God. The main aim of the *bhakti* poets was to make the common man realize that what God looked for was pure devotion rather than *Jnana*(knowledge). Poonthanam makes this evident in one of his couplets in the *Jnanappana*-

is poems explains how short one's life is on earth by mentioning everyday duties, common wishes/desires and celebration of local festivals.

Some call themselves erudite  
Without gaining the true essence of knowledge  
Just as the ass with saffron-loads upon its back  
Never senses the fragrance of saffron  
When one has the realization of Krishna,  
How trivial are these madding illusions!  
By measured counts, by steady degrees,  
Our transient lives wicker down  
While in heightened pace our desires trot  
One plans his harvest yields (*Onam*)  
Counts the New Year passing (*Vishu*),  
Lamenting the non-coming of the day of the auspicious fast  
(*Thiruvanthira*)  
One marks the month (*Kumbha*), birthday or birthstar (*Aswathi*)  
Or the day of the month to appease the souls of the dead (*Vrischika*)  
Contemplating that the taste of the feast was not what it used to be,  
Wishing how grand it would be to have a child,  
And live to see the child sire yet another child

Deciding that the land that came in as lease  
Should never be given back in its due time,  
And while one goes on pondering Thus,  
Poor thing! Just dies away,  
It is but the way of the Lord.<sup>73</sup>

Using examples everyone can relate to, Poonthanam conveyed the aspect of mortality in man. It is not easy to escape the scorn he has for erudition and knowledge gained without understanding. There is also an attempt to make the common people realize that if one is close to god, all these are but illusions. An attempt to make one realize that his status in society and devotion don't have any connection can be seen in this poem

Let there be no regrets within  
That it was not possible to free oneself of earthly desires  
It is enough just to listen to the blessing of His name!  
Even if it be that one is a lesser mortal  
This matters not;  
Save the dumb-  
Or the mute born-  
Of the myriad of His holy names  
Let one chant but one-just once a day  
Or while at rest  
Or be it in dreams unknowingly,  
In jest,  
Or even for some other's sake,  
Or wherever on earth one is,  
If only the chant of His dear name is upon the tongue,  
Or perhaps even if the Name is just heard with devotion,  
This birth turns into fulfillment  
And attains bliss with the Eternal One

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<sup>73</sup>Gopi Kottoor, *Poonthanam's Hymns: The Fountain of God*, p.29

Thus, spake the seer Ved Vyas,  
The revered philosopher Sreedharacharya,  
The Vedas honour this truth,  
The Lord Himself says so in the Bhagavad Gita.  
Chant with utter devotion the Names of the Lord  
Wade in bliss into the Brahmom, chanting his name,  
And so purged, enter Him.<sup>74</sup>

Poonthanam's aim was to make devotion accessible even to the common man and herein he breaks the age-old idea that one has to sacrifice all worldly desires in order to attain salvation or know god. According to him the only requirement is heartfelt devotion which pleases God and he cites the names of the various scholars who propagated this in order to legitimize his belief.

### **B. Thunchathu Ezhutachan**

The name is composed of two words- *ezhutu* (letters and *achan* (leader or father). It indicates a title more than a name and *Thunchathu* is supposed to be the name of his house.<sup>75</sup> The author of several classical works in Malayalam such as *Adhyathma Ramayanam*, *Bharatam* and *Bhagavatam*. He is remembered for popularizing a special form of verse known as the *kilippattu*. *Kili* means parrot and *pattu* means song. In this type of composition, a bird is the one who sings a poem.<sup>76</sup> In some of the poems, instead of a parrot, a swan or a bee takes the chief role but they are all known by the same term as the word *kili* also means bird. An example of how the poem is written:

“O! lovely parrot! Who came singing Rama's name,  
Tell us, please, the story of Sri Rama”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Gopi Kottoor, *Poonthanam's Hymns: The Fountain of God*, p. 33

<sup>75</sup> K M George, *A Survey of Malayalam Literature*, p.67

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p.68

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.69

In *Adhyatma Ramayanam*, written by Ezhutachan, Rama is portrayed as a God and songs of praise are sung by the devoted author. His command of language and usage of figures of speech is very refreshing.

“Sita when Rama had to leave for the forest:

When I walk with my Lord  
Thorn and stone,  
The sharp and the hard,  
Are as flowers to me.

You are like the love-god  
With his arrow of flowers:  
Do not leave me!

When Rama broke the bow and won Sita:

The bow broke  
With a sound like thunder  
And kings shudder  
Like frightened snakes  
But Maithili<sup>78</sup>  
Was happy as a peahen<sup>79</sup>  
She came towards him  
And garlanded him, first  
With her lotus eyes  
And then with wedding flowers

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<sup>78</sup> Sita was also known as Maithili as she was the daughter of Janaka, king of Mithila

<sup>79</sup> Thunder terrifies snakes and gladdens peafowls is an old belief<sup>79</sup>

“Though it was an adaptation of the Sanskrit original, it was a fresh take and the Sanskrit words used maintain the strength and profundity of the original and yet is pleasing to the educated man.”<sup>80</sup> This balance is hard to achieve and here we see why this poet occupies a primary position in the literary history of Kerala.

The *Mahabharatam* is his magnum opus as Ezhuthachan has presented the essence and spirit of the original in his own way.<sup>81</sup> One can notice in this work, that he is extremely comfortable with Sanskrit and that his vocabulary is vast. The language is simple and straight yet powerful and persuasive.

Gandhari’s lamentation (*vilapam*) addressing Krishna:

Here, on the earth, smeared with blood,  
Lies famous Arjuna’s son  
A boy bright as an emerald...  
O my darling son, Duryodhana  
You have left behind  
Your crown of gold, your ornaments  
The dignity and valour as great as Indra’s  
you have left them all  
and poor me and your old father---  
Why did u leave us Thus,?.....  
My heart breaks as I look at you:  
You ought to be lying on a bed of silk  
And here you lie in a pool of blood...<sup>82</sup>

He triumphs in evoking deep pathos and emotion and also handles philosophical matters with equal skill. He wrote in response to the challenge of the society in those days, and he was guided by the force of prevailing circumstances to some extent<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>K M George, *A Survey of Malayalam Literature*, p.73

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p.74

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p.76

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp77-78

Ezhutachan was not associated with any court or received patronage. The Zamorins formally established the institution of the *Ezhuttu Palli* in their palace which was training institute to encourage cultural awareness and literacy among the new rich middle classes.<sup>84</sup> We can infer that not everybody could afford these new institutions and hence it was not an equitable development.

The writings which developed outside the court were aimed at engaging the common people in devotion and making them understand the greater truths found in the Vedic texts in lucid and simple language. The texts also made them understand that all that God wanted was a pure devotion from the heart rather than great learning and wealth.

The writings produced within the court and outside the court are important as they help us to see the themes of interest of the people in the medieval world of Calicut. History can be written objectively only if we look at the society as the people of those times witnessed it. Literature though exaggerated many times, offers us a picture that palace chronicles and history treatises cannot offer. They showcase the society in a different light. Hence both kinds of writings are important to understand the development of Calicut and the field of literature in Kerala.

Before we forget, the Mappilas also contributed to the development of a symbiotic culture to Calicut. The Muslim merchants integrated themselves with the mainstream Hindu society and Thus, evolved a new form of rituals, art-forms etc. The *Mappilapattu* genre of literature that evolved from this coming together of cultures.<sup>85</sup> More will be dealt in the next chapter.

## **2.9. Conclusion**

Much of the revenue received by the Zamorin was spent on festivities and for patronizing literary pursuits, which created a larger than life image of the Zamorin

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<sup>84</sup> MGS Narayanan, *Calicut: The City of Truth Revisited*, p.186

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.189

showcasing his sovereignty over the whole region of Kerala. Even in the later years of their reign, when their hold over the kingdom slowly started declining, the amounts spent on these rituals and ceremonies did not dwindle. The rulers continued to offer their patronage and support to these activities which while projecting the Zamorin as a great ruler also contributed to the cultural domination of Calicut. The cultural festival of *Mamankam* helped the Zamorin in maintaining his hold over his territories and also helped him in creating a larger than life image of himself which created awe in the eyes of the onlookers. There is a saying “seeing is believing”. In line with it, the *Mamankam* was a visual projection of the superiority of the Zamorin. What was visually showcased was retained in the minds of the people and hence they accepted the rulership of the Zamorin. It also set in motion the triggers of urbanity by stimulating the market and bringing about the inter mingling of people from various backgrounds.

The Zamorins have contributed greatly to the literary and cultural production in Kerala. Many of the modern day poets and authors looked to their past and the language has evolved much. The fact that the Zamorins themselves were involved in the art of writing, gave impetus to the production of literary works as they gave the necessary patronage and created the environment for art and culture to flourish. K M George writes, “Out of the *Kilippatu* genre, Malayalam literature has blossomed forth, and has attained a vitality and range, comparable to any other developed language of modern India.<sup>86</sup> Two ancient art forms of Kerala known as *koothu* and *pathakam*, modes of telling stories using both prose and verse could utilize the *champus*. The hereditary performers known as *chakyars* incorporated even *slokas* and interpreted it according to their will. K M George opines that *champus* were produced extensively for use in these traditional art forms.<sup>87</sup> We saw how the *Mamankam* was used to display even the cultural riches of the land.

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<sup>86</sup> K M George, *A Survey of Malayalam Literature*, p.85

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p.87



Though K V Krishna Ayyar is of the opinion that the Zamorins were great patrons of culture and learning, MGS Narayanan disagrees with him. He is of the opinion that compared to the Perumals, the contribution of the Zamorins was limited. He also raises the issue of how the aspect of caste bound many from achieving literary excellence.<sup>88</sup> We saw this in the case of Poonthanam.

Thus, the cultural festival of *Mamankam* and the cultural production of the land went hand in hand as they complemented the Zamorin in his attempts to legitimize his rule and showcase his authority. The Zamorin utilized everything he had to showcase his power and those measures in turn sent waves of changes in many aspects ushering in the early modern in Kerala. The cultural pursuits and performative traditions that got evolved around Mamankam festival necessitated a lot of preparative phases, which involved huge spending of wealth, which in turn made inevitable the recycling of wealth coming from spice cultivation and trade. From the remote spice hinterland to the riverine belt of Bharatapuzha and also from the festal spaces to Ponnani and finally to Calicut, commodities flowed, while recycled wealth that came as price for the cargo entered through the same channel in reverse order or promoting cultural and literary endeavours.

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<sup>88</sup> MGS Narayanan, *Calicut: The City of Truth Revisited*, pp.181-2

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Urbanization at work in Calicut**

This chapter takes a look at the urbanization process of Calicut. It would be foolish to say that Calicut was transformed into an urban centre only because of its trading activities and its vibrancy evolved out of contacts with traders and merchants from far and wide. Indeed, there was a significant development for the urban formulation in Calicut due to its participation in the Indian Ocean trade. We have seen how the Zamorin worked his best to ensure the goodwill of the traders. Foreign contact transformed Calicut as did its dependence on liminal geographies. The connection brought about due to trade within hinterlands also contributed to Calicut acquiring urban characters. One of the first characters that historians have used to identify a city is that the area in question is no longer dependent on agriculture for its subsistence but is dependent on the production of commodities for the market. The distinction in the type of subsistence activities is the first indicator and we see that Calicut, owing to its geographical position, was devoid of agricultural production. It depended on the local Muslim traders for commodities of everyday use. A city is also an area that is dependent on nearby regions for its needs and herein we see the dependence Calicut had on Ponnani and Tirunavaye with which commodities from the vast agrarian space was made to flow to this port city.

One must always keep in mind that local history rather than being self contained is always part of something larger and therefore must be explored within broader contexts. To stick to an isolated method of study of the history of a locality would deprive the historian of reality as the study would be flawed. "Familiarity with the broader sweep of human events is no less essential to the understanding of the history

of a particular locality than knowledge of local history is to an understanding of the nation's past.”<sup>1</sup>

Hence, one cannot study the urbanization process of a certain region without considering the influence the surrounding areas had on the development of this region. Cities can never develop in isolation and what makes a region evolve urban characteristics is its dependence on surrounding areas, which sustained the city in multiple degrees and ways. A city is never uniform in its defining features because it is out of the amalgamation of various features from near and far regions that it develops urban characteristics. “Adequate attention has not been given to the pre-modern port's negotiation with its larger hinterland- hinterlands that may cross borders, or even lie overseas. These larger hinterlands come into play when we examine the port in its entirety: its links with neighbouring polities and other fiscal regimes, for example through regional networks.”<sup>2</sup>

Calicut was the primary capital of the Zamorin and Ponnani, his secondary capital. While there was a residence in Calicut away from the mercantile part of the town, the Zamorin had another palace in Ponnani. This town was important to the Zamorin as it was here the Nairs, the men who made up his military resided. In later years, Ponnani was also the place chosen by the Marakkar traders to settle down. Since the Nairs and the Marakkars (who later became part of the naval force of the Zamorin) resided in Ponnani, the town also came to be known as the war capital of the Zamorin. In the previous chapter we have seen the role of Tirunavaye for the Zamorin. It played an important role in augmenting the authority the Zamorin wielded due to the display of power that occurred here every twelve years.

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<sup>1</sup> A M Shinas, P J Vincent (ed.), *Local History: Quest for Theories and Method*, Sahitya Pravarthaka Cooperative Society Ltd., Kottayam, 2016, pp.15-16

<sup>2</sup> Rila Mukherjee, *Vanguards of Globalization: Port Cities from the Classical to the Modern*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2014, p.2

Let us look at how the Zamorin capitalized the available resources and people in each region and how they contributed to the development of Calicut as a town of world wide renown.

### 3.1. Calicut: The Makeup of the Society

Calicut is identified as a major port and a town developed in the vicinity of the coast and we need to study about it in order to understand the pattern of urbanization process at work here. Varthema describes the city- “Calicut is on the mainland, the sea beats against the walls of the houses. The city has no wall around it, but the houses extend for a mile, built close together, and then the wide houses, that is, the houses separate one from the other, cover a space of about six miles.”<sup>3</sup> The details from Varthema indicate that the city was then located closer to the sea.

There were people belonging to different castes in Calicut. Barbosa writes that there were “eighteen castes which were separated into two groups of seven upper and eleven lower castes”.<sup>4</sup> The local communities that constituted the society in Calicut were the Nambudiri Brahmins, Nairs, the *Vyaparis*, *Mukkuvars*, *Tiyans* or *Iravas* etc. Among other Hindu castes who came to trade were the *Chettis* from the Southeast coast of India and the *Banias* from Gujarat. The Muslim communities included the *Paradesi* Muslims who were traders from Arabia, Persia and the *Mappilas*.<sup>5</sup> The mercantile dynamics in the city stemmed from the multi-cultural and trans-regional trading segments who flocked at the port-city.

Varthema while describing the composition of the society, mentions the occupations of each caste. He writes, “The first class of pagans in Calicut is called the Brahmins. The Brahmins are the chief persons of the faith as priests are among us. The second are *Naeri* (Nairs), who are the same as the gentlefolks amongst us;

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<sup>3</sup> John Winter Jones, *The Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema of Bologna from 1501 to 1508*, New Delhi, 1997, p.55

<sup>4</sup> Stephen F Dale, ‘Communal Relations in Pre-Modern India: 16<sup>th</sup> century Kerala’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol.16, No 2/3, December 1973, p. 320

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322

and these are obliged to bear sword and shield or bows and lances. When they go through the street, if they did not carry arms they would no longer be gentlemen. The third class of pagans are called *Tiva (Tiyān)*, who are artizans. The fourth class are called *Mechua (Mukkuvan)*, and these are fishermen. The fifth class are called *Poliar (Pulayan)*, who collect pepper, wine and nuts. The sixth class are called *Hirava (Vettuvan)*, and these plant and gather in rice.”<sup>6</sup> Tome Pires mentions a class known as the *Kaniyans* who were involved in the manufacture of salt.<sup>7</sup>

We can infer from the above description that there existed a wide variety of people in Calicut and in the surrounding areas. Caste hierarchies existed amongst the inhabitants and it was a major hindrance in the inter mingling of communities. Varthema writes, “the *Poliar* and the *Hirava*, may not approach either the Naeri or the Brahmins within fifty paces unless they have been called by them, and they always go by private ways through the marshes. And when they through the said places, they always go crying out with a loud voice, and this they do in order that they may not meet the Naeri or the Brahmins; for should they not be crying out, and any of the Naeri should be going that way and see their fruits, or meet any of the said class, the above mentioned Naeri may kill them without incurring any punishment: and for this reason they always cry out.”<sup>8</sup> People belonging to the lower castes could not interact with those from the higher castes. They were shunned by the upper castes. However, these social groups resided in the hinterland part of the city and they were not integral components of the mercantile city located near the sea.

From its inception as a port town, the settlements in Calicut had two components - the mercantile part of the town and the royal quarters. Unlike other cities in medieval India where the royal capital and the mercantile town intermingled, here the case was different. The Zamorin chose to keep his royal quarters away from the core area of trade and the hustle-bustle related to it. The royal quarters were located almost two kilometers away from the mercantile city. The port town, which was the core area of

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<sup>6</sup> John Winter Jones, *The Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema of Bologna from 1501 to 1508*, p.57

<sup>7</sup> Armando Cortesao (ed.), *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, p.72

<sup>8</sup> John Winter Jones, *The Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema of Bologna from 1501 to 1508*, pp 57-8

mercantile town of Calicut, was allowed to evolve into a cosmopolitan and secular space. Thus, the Zamorin chose to reside out of the bustling trading activities, even though his periodical visit to the mercantile town was referred to in the sources. But what was remarkable was the fact that foreign traders reaching the mercantile segment of the town had to go all the way to the royal court with presents of varying value and rare cargo that they brought, to seek permission for continued trade with Calicut. It shows that there was frequent linking of the activities in the mercantile town with the royal quarters. Though they were located separately, there were interactions between both parts of the town.

Amongst the previous rulers, the Cheras, we observe the royalty taking an active interest as well as participation in trading activities and now it is a shift that we observe with the Zamorins. The Zamorins wanted the benefits of the trade to fill their coffers and Hence, provided the necessary environment for trade to flourish. Simon Digby writes, “The custom (of plundering ship wrecks) extended to the ports of the rich pepper-growing area of Malabar with the exception of Calicut, whose rulers sought to attract trade by not applying it; the ruler of Calicut also did not confiscate wrecks.”<sup>9</sup> While they did not engage in trade, it is enlightening to see their interest in maintaining the welfare of the traders. Ibn Batuta mentions two examples- in the event of their vessel capsizing, as the time for their journey to China drew near, the Zamorin fitted out a junk (sailing vessel) for them. In the event of another vessel capsizing, the Zamorin and his officers were on the shore helping the traders recover the lost items.<sup>10</sup> These examples show that the ruler did not keep himself aloof from what was happening in the port city and its vicinity, but was very much a part of its issues and concerns, because he knew very well that anything that negatively affected the trade of the port would bring negative repercussions on the flow of wealth to his exchequer.

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<sup>9</sup> Simon Digby, ‘The Maritime Trade of India’, p.153

<sup>10</sup> Mahdi Hussain, *The Rehla of Ibn Batuta*, pp.191-2

Abd-er-Razzak informs us about the presence of two mosques in Calicut and that there are a considerable number of Muslims who meet every Friday to offer prayers. He also tells us they have a judge and a priest.<sup>11</sup> The Muslim traders were treated well and no compromise was done in case they suffered any injustice. Ibn Batuta mentions an example wherein one of the nephews of the king had taken away the sword of a Muslim merchant, who then complained to the king and how punishment was meted to the offender.<sup>12</sup> We also read in the account of Ma Huan that in respect for each other's customs, the Zamorin and the Muslims made a pact to refrain from consuming pork and beef respectively and how the custom was prevalent even in his times.<sup>13</sup> A foreign Muslim merchant, *paradesi* Muslim, was put in charge of matters related to overseas trade while a Mappila Muslim was put in charge of matters related to coastal and domestic trade.<sup>14</sup> Ibn Battuta mentions that the Shahbander is from Bahrein.<sup>15</sup> The Zamorin and the Muslim merchants shared a close bond due to their mutual interest in trade. It was this bond built upon the cultural sensibilities of each other that cemented patron-client type of relationship among them.

Varthema writes, "It must be known the pagans do not navigate much, but it is the Moors who carry the merchandise; for in Calicut there are at least fifteen thousand Moors, who are for the greater part natives of the country."<sup>16</sup> The number of Muslims is great and it shows how popular Calicut was for the Muslim traders to settle down. Many of those whom Varthema accounts for as Muslims are the natives who converted to Islam, as it (Islam) was not bound by caste rules and also offered them the benefit to engage in trading activities. The caste rules had defined occupations for each group and there was no fluidity but Islam had no such bindings and Hence, many may have adopted Islam when it was introduced by the foreign merchants.

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<sup>11</sup> R H Major, *India in the Fifteenth Century*, pp.13-14

<sup>12</sup> Mahdi Hussain, *The Rehla of Ibn Batutta*, p.194

<sup>13</sup> Geo Phillips, 'Ma Huan's account of Cochin, Calicut and Aden', p.345

<sup>14</sup> Pius Malekandathil, 'Societal Process and a Mercantile City: A Study on the Town of Calicut', p. 4

<sup>15</sup> Mahdi Hussain, *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta*, p.189

<sup>16</sup> John Winter Jones, *The Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema of Bologna from 1501 to 1508*, p. 61

Other than the Muslim merchants, there were many other traders too belonging to different regions. Many of them settled down in Calicut owing to the favourable conditions for trade. Each had their own settlement area, very often various mercantile groups congregating on the basis of profession, caste and religion. The Bania merchants had a temple in their residential area and the Jesuits had a church from 1591.<sup>17</sup> The Chinese had a factory which was known as the *cheenakotta*.<sup>18</sup> The Muslim merchants were extremely influential and we read that the Zamorin encouraged the lower castes to become Muslims so that the Zamorin would have sufficient sailors to sail his warships and he ordered that at least one male member of every family of the fishermen should become a Muslim.<sup>19</sup> Thus, we see that it was not merely creating secular space for the traders but in certain cases, the Zamorin himself ordered the conversion of his subjects. MGS Narayanan writes, “In the long run a beneficial cultural exchange was benefited, i.e. the new culture was absorbed silently by the major community through language, faith, art patterns, and even race-mixture while the settlers borrowed the style of life and thought from the local people.”<sup>20</sup>

Pyrard writes,

“Calicut is the busiest and most full of all traffic and commerce in the whole of India; it has merchants from all parts of the world, and of all nations and religions by reason of the liberty and security accorded to them there; for the king permits the exercise of every religion, and yet it is strictly forbidden to talk, dispute or quarrel on that subject, so that there never arises any contention on that score, every one living in great liberty of conscience under the favour or authority of the king, who holds that to be a cardinal maxim of government with a view to making his kingdom very rich and of great intercourse.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Pius Malekandathil, ‘Societal Process and a Mercantile City: A Study on the Town of Calicut’, p. 3

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.4

<sup>19</sup> S M Mohamed Koya, *Mappilas of Malabar*, p.8

<sup>20</sup> MGS Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society, 1972, p. 6

<sup>21</sup> Albert Gray (ed.), *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval*, Vol I, p.404



Thus, we can infer from these texts the kind of decisions that the Zamorin took for promoting trade were quite radical for his times. Indeed, many rulers did try their best to make the areas under their jurisdiction suitable for trade and traders since all rulers wanted trade to fuel their economy and in return receive a share in the profits. However, we see the Zamorin a step ahead of his time. This is where the secret of the rise of Calicut and its maintained popularity over centuries is unearthed.

While the wide variety of traders contributed to the availability of a large number of products from far and wide and also increased the production of commodities in the hinterland, the presence of these traders had an effect on the society as well. Many customs and practices were exchanged and in the process a symbiotic culture got formulated in Calicut. The Muslim merchants contributed much as many of them settled down in Calicut and nearby areas and entered into matrimony with the local Hindu women. This eventually had effects on the society. *Pudu Islam* or New Islam developed in and around Calicut. The Zamorin also encouraged the conversion of many of the fisher folk to Islam with a view to strengthening his navy.<sup>22</sup> Other than those who became wives of Muslim merchants, many belonging to the lower castes also converted to Islam as it was emancipation from the bindings of caste.<sup>23</sup> The Muslims also were influenced by the new converts as we see some of them started the practice of matrilineal inheritance as followed by the Hindus. A new dialect known as Arabi-Malayalam also developed and it was commonly known as ‘Mappila Malayalam’. It is written in Arabic script but the words used are a mixture of both Arabic and Malayalam.<sup>24</sup> Various books have been written in this language and the most prominent among Mappila literature is *Mappila Pattu*. It includes poems and songs on topics related to religion and the history of Islam. In the later years other popular themes of love and romance, satire and heroism also were dealt with in these

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<sup>22</sup> MGS Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society, 1972, p.6

<sup>23</sup> S M Mohamed Koya, *Mappilas of Malabar* p.92

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

poems.<sup>25</sup> The houses of these early Muslim converts were built according to the *Nalukettu* style which was followed by Hindu joint families.<sup>26</sup>

While the mercantile part of the town exhibited these characteristics, the royal part of the town was evolving as a centre of learning and culture. The palace was situated near the *Tali* temple. The *Tali* temple was also the site of the *Revathi Pattathanam*. It attracted Brahmins and scholars from various regions. The fame of the *Tali* temple was utilized to conduct the assembly and the assembly in turn contributed to the fame of the temple.<sup>27</sup>

Isaac Land in his article 'Doing History in the Coastal Zone'<sup>28</sup> introduces historians to three new spaces on the coast- the urban foreshore (the immediate area to the sea bustling with activity), urban offshore (the areas that are reclaimed from the sea by engineering and is located away from the shore) and the urban estuary (the area that is affected in its character by the trade). While the second category is not applicable to Calicut, it would be interesting to note the urbanity that developed on the foreshore and the areas which were transformed to a great extent due to the trade in Calicut.

The mercantile part of the town of Calicut can be counted as the foreshore as it was here that all the facilities for trade were made available. "The foreshores are made up of strangers and people who earn their livelihood by supplying strangers with services. Foreshoring behaviours are those that welcome, orient and facilitate the use of the port town by arriving strangers."<sup>29</sup> We notice this in the mercantile town of Calicut as we read of how various services were provided to the arriving traders by the king's officers. Both parties were strangers to each other but the officers helped the traders with the sale and purchase of goods and acquainted them with the port town. Urbanity is witnessed here in the forms of flexibility and openness afforded to the traders which was not the case in the areas located further away from the shore.

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<sup>25</sup> S M Mohamed Koya, *Mappilas of Malabar*, p.96

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.100-1

<sup>27</sup> V V Haridas, *Zamorins And the Political Culture of Medieval Kerala*, p.213

<sup>28</sup> Isaac Land, 'Doing History in the Coastal Zone' in B. Brad, K.Bell, Robert James (ed.) *Port Towns and Urban Cultures: International Histories of the Waterfront*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Isaac Land, 'Doing History in the Coastal Zone', pp.269-270

The traders were not judged on the basis of their looks or nationality but it was the products they brought and exchanged that was of primary importance. Facilities were provided to ease the process of trade and we infer from the writings of various medieval travelers as to how the Zamorin and his officers provided smooth functioning of trade.

Meanwhile Calicut continued evolving. In later years, the mercantile city began expanding towards the royal quarters as shops, commercial establishments and mansions arose by 1607. The mercantile town functioned as the area where bulk trade was conducted in bulk and cargo was sent for overseas export. The market attached to the royal town gained importance for the consumers in the hinterland. It also supplied cargo to the mercantile city. The market had its own set of rules and the first right to the commodities belonged to the royal servants and later to the merchants.<sup>30</sup> This market here had a lot of commodities from the hinterland and it was from here that the traders sought the commodities for export.<sup>31</sup> The traders and those who facilitated the trade were housed in the mercantile town for ease in the conduct of trade

The Zamorin tried his best to maintain the trade at Calicut as this in turn contributed to the amount of wealth he could possess. The Zamorin enlisted the help of the communities that were beneficial to him in their respective aspects to maintain his authority and hold over Calicut. When the Muslim traders were at their peak and were ready to collaborate with him in order to facilitate the growth of trade, he enlisted their services and even fought against foreign domination. However in the later years we see the Marakkar chiefs rebelling against the Zamorin and this was not taken in stride by the Zamorin and with the help of the Portuguese, he (Zamorin) went ahead with utterly razing them to the ground.<sup>32</sup> The local communities were enlisted to supply commodities for the smooth functioning of trade at Calicut and here we see the role played by Ponnani and Tirunavaye. The Zamorin had a hold over these territories with a view to accessing their produce.

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<sup>30</sup> Albert Gray (ed.), *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval*, Volume I. pp.411-12

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.411-12, p.412

<sup>32</sup> S M Mohamed Koya, *Mappilas of Malabar*, p.32

In 1582, the Portuguese as a result of a treaty with the Zamorin, earned the right to construct a factory at Ponnani and this resulted in the alienation of the Marakkar traders with the Zamorin. The Marakkar chief fortified his territory and it posed a threat to the Zamorin and the trade at Calicut, as the majority of the Muslim traders was loyal to the Marakkar chief.<sup>33</sup> The Zamorin teamed up with the Portuguese and fought against the Marakkars and eventually the latter surrendered. This encounter led to the alienation of the Muslims from the rulers. The long friendship that the Zamorin enjoyed with the Muslims, both Arab and local, started disintegrating now.

Mentioning the earlier days, Buchanan writes, “About fifty years ago the *Moplays* (*Mappillas*) of this place were very rich, and possessed vessels that sailed to Surat, Mocha, Madras and Bengal.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, we see that the Muslim traders never regained their commercial superiority after the fall of the Marakkars. They continued to trade but it was not profitable as before as they did not enjoy the support of the ruler. Buchanan further writes that the Mappillas in Ponnani were both traders and farmers and that many of them had turned to farming at the insistence of Tipu sultan,<sup>35</sup> which indicates the shift that this community was bound to make in their profession because of the chaos that evolved in the mercantile city of Calicut and its feeding urban unit of Ponnani.

In later years we see the coast that was originally without walls being protected by the erection of a human shield consisting of fishermen and Mukkuvas. This was a strategy on the part of the Zamorin to fight against the Portuguese and their attacks. Initially when the coast was unguarded, the fights with the Portuguese resulted in much damage but this human shield was an innovative technique to ward off the Portuguese.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> S M Mohamed Koya, *Mappilas of Malabar*, p.30

<sup>34</sup> Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar*, Vol II, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1999, p.420

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.422

<sup>36</sup> Pius Malekandathil, ‘Societal Process and a Mercantile City: A Study on the Town of Calicut’, p. 7

After the Marakkar traders and their Muslim supporters lost the confidence of the Zamorin, with the conflict with Kunjali Marakkar towards the end of the sixteenth century on the question of political assertion that he was alleged to have made, the position held by them was given to other sections of society, causing some alteration in the mercantile part of the city. The Muslim merchants lost the support of the king and it was a big blow to them as they lost their trade privileges. The Zamorin supported the Portuguese to capture Kunjali Marakkar. The Muslim officers were expelled and by 1607, Nairs, Banias and Brahmins occupied the key positions in the mercantile town which were earlier occupied by the Muslims.<sup>37</sup> We also do not read of the *Kozhikottu Koya* standing on the ceremonial platform in Tirunavaye during the Mamankam held in 1683. Pyrard writes that the chief offices of the *Alfandique* and the mercantile town were held by Brahmins and Nairs who had their residences in the hinterland part of the town and not in the mercantile town.<sup>38</sup> This was a shift in the earlier policy followed by the Zamorin. The traders and those who facilitated the trade were housed in the mercantile town for ease in the conduct of trade. We may infer that the Zamorin started employing natives of the country to important positions instead of the earlier practice to employ those who were traders themselves and knew the workings of markets.

In the light of the Portuguese attacks, the Zamorin also militarized his army and set up an artillery unit in Calicut in 1502 with the help of two Milanese artillerymen.<sup>39</sup> The palace of the Zamorin was also fortified with walls and moats. This development is seen in the beginning of the seventeenth century. The palace was also guarded strictly by a large number of soldiers.<sup>40</sup> The Nairs who formed the fighting force of the Zamorin were not primarily interested in such contestations as to fight against foreign domination but with the arising need, the Zamorin enlisted their service with tactics such as the propagation of ideas that evoked bravery and to die fighting. Several Nairs were also appointed in offices related to the activities of the port and this was

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<sup>37</sup>Pius Malekandathil, 'Societal Process and a Mercantile City: A Study on the Town of Calicut', p.8

<sup>38</sup> Albert Gray (ed.), *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval*, Volume I, p.362

<sup>39</sup> Pius Malekandathil, 'Societal Process and a Mercantile City: A Study on the Town of Calicut', p.9

<sup>40</sup> Albert Gray (ed.), *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval*, p.409

another reason for them to take up arms and fight valiantly for the causes of the mercantile town of Calicut, which till then was guarded by the Muslim mercantile cum warrior segments.

### **3.2. Revathi Pattathanam**

The *Revathi Pattathanam* was an annual literary assembly that was held in Calicut. “*Patta* is the Tamil form of the Sanskrit *Bhatta* (a person who knows the four *shastras*), and *Tanam* of *Danam* (gift). Thus, *Pattathanam* is either the giving away of *danams* to *Bhattas* or the award of the title of *Bhatta* to Brahmins of proved merit.”<sup>41</sup> In the initial days, the *Pattathanam* was a serious contest in which the candidates competed with one another for the prize and the judges were those who already had many *Tanams* to their credit.<sup>42</sup> It began on *Revathi*, the twenty seventh lunar asterism in the Malayalam month of *Tulam* (October-November) and came to an end on *Tiruvatira* or the sixth lunar asterism. Thus, the event acquired the name *Revathi Pattathanam*.

According to MGS Narayanan, this assembly was started by the Zamorin as per the advice of a saint called Kolkunnathu Shivangal. Brahmins were tested for their scholarship through debates on special issues. On the last day the winner would be announced, who would receive gold from the Zamorin.<sup>43</sup> According to V V Haridas, the *Pattathanam* was used by the Zamorins to boast of their patronage to scholarship as it would contribute to them achieving a larger than life image and eventually provide them legitimacy.<sup>44</sup> It stimulated an intellectual culture that promoted literary pursuits and art of learning around the royal quarters.

While the *Revathi Pattathanam* was the assembly of the Brahmin scholars, there was a family of Arabic scholars who flourished in Calicut before the rise of the

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<sup>41</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, p.296

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.296

<sup>43</sup> MGS Narayanan, ‘Kozhikode Through the Centuries’ in Kunhali V (ed.), *Calicut in History*, p. 51

<sup>44</sup> V V Haridas, *Zamorins And the Political Culture of Medieval Kerala*, p.213

Makhdoom family in Ponnani. The Qadis of Calicut were descendants of Malik ibn Habib who had migrated from Yemen. Malik ibn Dinar constructed a mosque at Chaliyam and this was their headquarters before they shifted to Calicut.<sup>45</sup> They contributed to the development of Arabic language and literature. Some of the works authored by them are *Umdatul Ashhas Wa Nazhatul Ahbab* (support of the companions and entertainment for the dear ones) written by Qadi Zayn al Din Ramadan ibn Qadi Musa al Shaliyati which contains four chapters on dogma, philosophy, prayers and hymns, reasons for poverty and prosperity and spiritual deeds; *Al Fath al Mubin* (The Great Victory) which describes the condition of the Muslims under the Zamorin Raja of Calicut and instigates them to fight against foreign rulers and describes the atrocities faced by the Muslims because of the Portuguese etc.<sup>46</sup>

### 3.3. Ponnani and Tirunavaye

Ponnani was the location of the Zamorin's second palace. It was an important port for the trade in Calicut as it is located near Tirunavaye. In and around Ponnani, there were many palaces and temples such as the Trikkavil Kovilakam, the Trikkavil temple, the Vaikunthapurattu temple, Vairanellur Kovilakam, the Vairanellur temple etc.<sup>47</sup> The Trikkavil temple was located near the Trikkavil Kovilakam and was patronized by the Zamorin.

Barbosa describes it, "along the coast to the south there is a river on which is another city of Moors, amongst whom a few Gentiles live, and it is called Panani (Ponnani). The Moors are very rich merchants and own much shipping. The King of Calicut collects much revenue from this city."<sup>48</sup> We see that it is known as the city of the Moors as majority of the Muslim traders were inhabitants of this city. Barbosa also attributes to the presence of ships and we know that the Muslim traders later became

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<sup>45</sup> K M Mohamed, 'Arab Relation with Malabar Coast from 9<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries', E K G Nambiar (ed.), *The Malabar*, Calicut: University of Calicut, 2001, p.13

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp12-13

<sup>47</sup> V V Haridas, *Zamorins And the Political Culture of Medieval Kerala*, p.216

<sup>48</sup> Henry Stanley (trans.), *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar*, p.153

the naval officers of the king. The Marakkars were originally traders who later became the fighting squad of the Zamorin at sea when the Portuguese tried to monopolize the trade. The Mappilla merchants were also inhabitants of this town. These merchants were also prosperous merchants but they shared certain social and cultural characteristics of the Hindus as they adopted the matrilineal system of inheritance.<sup>49</sup>

Francis Buchanan also gives an extensive description of Ponnani. He writes, “Panyani (Ponnani) contains 500 houses belonging to traders, with above 40 mosques and at least 1000 huts inhabited by the lower orders of people. It is very irregularly built; but many of the houses are two stories high, and seem to be comfortable dwellings. They are built of stone, and thatched with coco-nut leaves. The huts are inhabited by boatmen and fishermen, who were formerly *Mucuas*, a low caste of Hindus; but now they have all embraced the faith of *Mahomet*.”<sup>50</sup> Again we are made to realize that Ponnani was home to the Muslim traders and that their influence on the local community was worth mentioning as many of the lower castes had converted to Islam.

Ponnani was ceded to the Zamorin by the Tirumanasseri chief in return for his help against the Raja of Cochin. Ayyar writes that as the authority of the Zamorin extended southward, the Zamorin started spending more time in Ponnani.<sup>51</sup> Ponnani was important to the Zamorins as it was located on a sandy plain on the south side of the Bharatapuzha and had access to the hinterland of the Bharatapuzha and only boats could enter this port.<sup>52</sup> Buchanan writes of the items of trade, “Much rice is exported from Hence, to the northern parts of the province of Malabar. From Cochin are bought canoes, spices, sugar, sugar-cane, jaggery, wheat and mustard seed; and the returns are iron smelted in the interior parts of the country, and rice both rough and

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<sup>49</sup> Stephen F Dale, ‘Communal Relations in Pre-Modern India: 16<sup>th</sup> century Kerala’, p. 322

<sup>50</sup> Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar*, p.420

<sup>51</sup> K V Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, p. 30

<sup>52</sup> Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar*, p.420



freed from the husk. From Anjengo are brought cotton cloths wrought there, and coco-nuts.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, we see that rice was a major commodity of exchange and it was sent to the northern parts of Malabar such as Calicut which were deficient in rice.

When the Marakkar merchants who initially had Cochin as their base were being troubled by the Portuguese, they shifted to Ponnani in 1524. The relations between the Marakkar merchants and the Zamorin have been dealt with in the first chapter. The Zamorin realized that if he teamed up with the merchants, he could defeat the Portuguese and he allowed them to develop as his naval segment which could foil the plans of the Portuguese at sea. Together they did fight the Portuguese but their relation waned toward the end of the sixteenth century.

Many Muslim *shaykhs* who came to propagate Islam settled down in Ponnani. Among them was Shaykh Zayn al Din Ibn Ali and Shaykh al Din ibn Mahammad al Ghazzali, the writer of the *Tuhfat ul Mujahideen*. They have contributed to the rise of Ponnani as a Muslim town. The rise of the Makhdoom family whose activities were surrounded around the Big Juma Masjid made Ponnani a centre of Islamic learning and in later years Ponnani came to be known as the little Mecca of Malabar.<sup>54</sup> Zayn al Din Ibn Ali belonged to the Makhdoom family and they were reputed for their erudition, piety, dedication and commitment to the cause of knowledge as a result of which they occupied a prime position among the Arabic scholars of Kerala.<sup>55</sup> He built the big mosque in Ponnani which later became a reputed centre for advanced studies in Arabic. He witnessed the tortures inflicted by the Portuguese on the Muslim traders as they wanted to monopolize the trade for themselves. He was so affected by the condition of the Muslims that he wrote in order to instigate his fellow brethren to fight this injustice.<sup>56</sup> Ponnani was also the residence of the Thangals. Buchanan writes, “Ponnani is the residence of the *Tangul*, or chief priest of the *Moplays*

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<sup>53</sup> Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar*, p.421

<sup>54</sup> S M Mohamed Koya, *Mappilas of Malabar*, p.9

<sup>55</sup> K M Mohamed, ‘Arab Relation with Malabar Coast from 9<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries’, p. 12

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13

(*Mappilas*) who says that he descended from Ali and Fatima, the daughter of *Mahomet*.”<sup>57</sup>

We see the development of Ponnani as a centre of education and trade. The shifting of the Marakkar merchants must have been an impetus to the trade already flourishing here. The settling down of scholarly Muslim families was another added benefit to Ponnani as it developed as city of learning for Islamic scholars. It was the harmonious trade relations enjoyed by the Muslim traders that brought these scholars to Ponnani. Ponnani was away from the hustle and bustle of a trade emporium like Calicut but it was not isolated as many commodities available at Calicut were taken from Ponnani. The location of Ponnani was of great importance to its development as an asset for the Zamorin. Ponnani developed as a port town as well as a centre of learning for the Islamic scholars. Many settled down here and we see from the description of Barbosa that it was a ‘Moorish town’. The coming of these scholars must have definitely created changes in the society that already existed there.

We have already explored the importance of Tirunavaye and how it developed as a centre of sacral importance. The influx of commodities for the Mamankam, the coming together of various functionaries must have definitely affected the nature of the society in Tirunavaya. While we cannot prove it with evidences from texts we can make inferences that conducting of a festival of such a grand nature inevitably meant the inter mingling of various sections of the society and the king employed various craftsmen for a variety of jobs at the site of the Mamankam. Hence, in the sacral centre, caste and social boundaries may have been broken to a small extent to facilitate the smooth celebration of the Mamankam festival. We cannot vouch for a radical change but the commodities and the skills needed for the conduct of the festival were provided by different groups and Hence, a certain degree of mixing between people was necessary.

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<sup>57</sup> Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar*, p.421

### 3.4. Three tiered Urbanism

We started this study with the aim of understanding the development of the city in Calicut. Based on our observations so far, we have understood that the main stimulant for the rise of Calicut was the presence of the port. The port was the focus around which everything functioned and this in turn led to the area surrounding it to gain an urban character. A port city can be defined as an,

“urban settlement which has a set of specific characteristics derived from maritime functions (of exchange, enterprise and transport) which on the one hand set the settlement apart from its surrounding region and on the other determine the physical, economic and social configuration of the settlement.”<sup>58</sup>

We notice the evolution of Calicut from a strip of land by the sea to a famous port in the Indian Ocean trade. Calicut cannot be simply labeled as a city that was located at a port but we see how the requirements of the port led to the region surrounding it to acquire an urban character. The activities at the port induced features of urbanity to filter in and transform the region to showcase early modern characteristics. The need for the smooth functioning of the port generated the characteristics we saw being exhibited in Calicut. Atiya H Kidwai writes, “the specialized function determines the character, morphology, structure and functioning of the settlement.”<sup>59</sup> The role which the port played required a certain form of settlement to arise and it had to be distinct from the settlements in the interior. The customs and practices followed in the countryside could not be adopted in the region surrounding the port as it would be detrimental to its growth. Only those ports that were well equipped in terms of possessing a good harbor for the ships to anchor, viable transportation facilities for the exchange and purchase of goods, presence of middlemen and laborers to handle the trade, comfortable rest houses for traders, safe storage houses, honest credit

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<sup>58</sup> Atiya Habeeb Kidwai, ‘Conceptual and Methodological Issues: Port, Cities and Port Hinterland’ p.26

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.26

systems etc could be successful in attracting traders from far and wide bringing along with them a variety of goods.

As a result, we saw how the Zamorin was instrumental in developing Calicut based on the needs of the port. The mercantile town was developed to accommodate traders of any nationality and race without any discrimination and facilities were made available to them regardless. The city of Calicut was not developed in one day neither was it static after a certain point. We have seen above how it continually evolved according to the needs that arose and we even witnessed how the arrival of the Portuguese, change in the dynamics of relations between the Zamorins and the Muslim traders etc., led to major transformations. We can Thus, safely say that the port of Calicut was the organizing principle for the city that was eventually formed. The functions played by the port determined the trajectory in which the city developed.

Calicut dazzled as a jewel on the Malabar Coast. However, the reason for the popularity of Calicut as a famous port can be attributed to various reasons. The primary reason for it is the dependency of Calicut on the towns of Ponnani and Tirunavaye. These two towns were the foundation on which Calicut stood. As a port, Calicut could fare well only if commodities of various kinds and that which was of interest to traders from far and wide could be offered by it. Calicut had a good geographical location and this aspect was exploited by the Zamorin to its utmost capacity. At its onset, the Zamorin realized that Calicut was deficient in commodities that would attract traders and in order to meet this deficiency he set about conquering various territories that were instrumental to the production of commodities that were required by the traders. While many of the traders write that Calicut was abundant in spices etc; we must note that not all of these were produced in Calicut alone but was brought to Calicut from the hinterland areas. The extensive river networks were utilized to bring in these commodities. Chaliyar, Kallayi and Bharatapuzha rivers formed the major transport network for the commodities from the hinterland.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Pius Malekandathil, Societal Process and a Mercantile City: A Study on the Town of Calicut', p.6

The produce from the remote hinterland was channelized to fairs and markets that appeared around shrines, *kavus* and temples along Bharatapuzha particularly during the times of their festivities and from there they were floated down to Tirunavaye, where intense preparatory activities were happening for the celebration of *Mamankam* every twelfth year (which necessitated long preparations for producing objects of culture and ritual), from where they were floated down to Ponnani, the secondary capital of Zamorin. In this process of commodity movement there was consequent process of wealth movement causing various converging points to evolve with varying degrees of urbanity. Tirunavaye, though was very active only during the days of Mamankam, was not always dormant for the rest of eleven years, but was the core centre of preparatory works of culture, secondary production and artisanal endeavours, causing some form of urbanity to evolve over there and converting it into a 'rurban (rural cum urban) centre'. The various rituals surrounding various asterisms kept this region vibrant and it all culminated at the end of eleven years with the grand Mamankam.<sup>61</sup> As a result markets flourished in this region in order to provide for the various needs arising in view of the celebrations and this in turn set rolling the wheels of urbanity in Tirunavaye. The presence of markets necessitated the presence of storehouses and these were located near the temples.<sup>62</sup>

Ponnani evolving as the secondary capital of the Zamorin experienced much more urban vibrancy because of the dynamics stemming from trade and religion-related endeavours. As we read above, Ponnani evolved as a seat of Islamic learning and this in turn must have contributed to the in flow of scholars and students alike which in turn led to the dissemination of knowledge and intermingling of ideas and cultures.

In this process there evolved a multi-tiered urban phenomena in the kingdom of Calicut, with the intensity of urbanity being felt at the port city of Calicut and that too in the mercantile segment of the society, while a secondary town evolved at Ponnani.

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<sup>61</sup> N M Namboothiri, *Mamankam Rekhakal*, p.46

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.46

Elements of urbanity appeared in varying degrees and scales in different converging pints of the routes of trade and cultural enterprise. In this process, Tirunavaye occupied a singular position, because of the significance of its site as ritual cum commercial cum political nerve centre between hinterland and the port and between the rural enclaves and the urban outlets on the coast.<sup>63</sup> This three-tiered urban format worked in integrity and the analysis of the urbanization process of Calicut necessitates the discussion on the way its material vibrancy was sustained and it actually depended upon the how the movement of commodities from the hinterland of Bharatapuzha to the apex port city of Calicut was engineered.

### **3.5. Conclusion**

The foregoing discussion shows how the urbanity of Calicut should be looked into. Obviously, the port-city of Calicut was the core centre of the urban phenomenon; but it was intrinsically linked with the phenomenon that connected both the mercantile city and the royal quarters of the Zamorin as to form one integral urban unit with two different sides, one signifying the dynamics of commerce and the other signifying the space of power. Both were mutually complementing and supplementing as the Zamorin derived power from the wealth that flowed from the mercantile city and the mercantile city evolved so, because of the safety and security ensured by Zamorins over the years. Even cultural production and literary enterprise were made possible because of the flow of wealth that this land experienced in the midst of this dynamics. It was the same dynamics that caused the city to evolve as a cosmopolitan urban enclave.

However, the city format cannot be viewed in isolation. There were multi-tiered urban structure in the kingdom of Calicut, out of which Calicut was standing at the apex. The increasing vibrancy of trade made wealth from comer to enter the hinterland in varying degrees causing varying elements of urbanity to appear in different parts of the kingdom, which happened to be nodal points of trade, religion

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<sup>63</sup> N M Namboothiri, *Mamankam Rekhakal*, p.43

and cultural enterprise. Out of them Tirunavaye, which happened to be the core area of Mamankam evolved as a “rurban” centre with features of rural and urban enclaves over years as a result of being the converging point of ritual and cultural life along the Bharatapuzha. Ponnani evolved as the secondary city, because of commercial and religious reasons, which received commodities from the hinterland and further transshipped to Calicut and other ports that stood in the priorities of the Zamorin. At the apex point stood Calicut, being sustained by the other pillars of secondary urban enclaves of different degrees of vitality from where commodities for its trade flowed and forces for sustaining its urban vibrancy uninterruptedly emerged. As Philip Curtin writes, "Trade and exchange across cultural lines have played a crucial role in human history, being perhaps the most important external stimuli to change, leaving aside the unmeasurable and less benign influence of military conquests."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Philip D Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*, London, 1984, p. 1

## CONCLUSION

Calicut has been understood from various angles in the last three chapters. We undertook this study to understand the process of urbanization and the role of the Zamorins in ushering in the forces that brought early modernity in Kerala. We have been trying to see how Calicut evolved as the merging point of people from different segments of society and economic background due to various processes that were at work over there.

The early modern can be defined as,

“a form of society in which markets were an active source of profits to merchants, who ordered their affairs rationally in order to pursue profits in a manner different from the still ‘feudal’ (for example, concerned with rank and honour) nobility. Moreover, governance was neither ‘modern’ (for example, dominated by bourgeois politicians) nor ‘feudal’ (for example, decentralized and dominated by independent lords), but centralized and partly bureaucratized, albeit under the direction of traditionally-sanctified monarchies and their noble ministers and officers.”<sup>1</sup>

The picture of the evolving urban society in Calicut was almost like this.

The rise of the Nediyruppu chieftain from being governors under the Cheraman Perumal to becoming the Zamorin, an independent ruler of an extensive territory is a remarkable achievement. They kept citing their legitimacy to establishing their capital at Calicut, owing to the command of the legendary Perumal. The connection to the Cheraman Perumal and his division of lands unto his trusted

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<sup>1</sup> Jack A Goldstone quoted in Pius Malekandathil (ed.), *The Indian Ocean in the Making of Early Modern India*, p. 17.



governors forms the basis of legitimacy for many of the rulers in Kerala. The Cheras were notable and politically formidable and hence a legacy traced back to them was to vouch for. The rise of the Zamorins and many such individual rulers who commanded extensive authority over their regions was the pre-cursor to the arrival of the processes that finally caused early modernity to appear in Kerala.

Trade was one of the most important garnerers of wealth for these newly established kingdoms and hence they tried their best to be in control of important ports. The *Nediyiruppu swarupam* gained control of Calicut while the *Perumpadappu swarupam* gained control over Cochin. The *swarupams* gained control over those areas lying adjacent to the sea as they realized that trade brought in immense returns and hence wanted to benefit from it. The Zamorin developed Calicut into a region of worldwide importance with his fair-trade policies and also added a secular and cosmopolitan outlook to the town. Traders found Calicut to be a favorable town to settle down and many of them did, leading to the evolution of a cosmopolitan culture. In all the chapters we see one constant factor that led to the rise of the development of Calicut and that was the continued interest that the Zamorin took to promote its trade.

“The nexus between political stability on the one hand and commercial growth and urban growth on the other was noticeable in medieval Indian history. Political stability is extremely important for the progressive growth of any town or city. While trade was the decisive factor for the growth of Calicut, the role played by the Zamorins in having a stable kingdom that was not divided due to wars of succession was commendable. The rules of succession were followed without any question and hence the rule was stable in the centre. The neighboring chiefs did sometimes trouble the rulers of Calicut by trying to assert their independence but the Zamorins maintained a norm of succession in such a way that among themselves they had no fights for ascension to the throne. Abd der Razzak writes, “no one reaches the throne by means of the strong hand.”<sup>2</sup> The senior most male member ascended the

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<sup>2</sup> R H Major, *India in the Fifteenth Century*, p.17

throne and hence political stability was maintained at the centre unlike many other kingdoms which were torn apart by wars of succession.

The Zamorin had many chieftains who accepted his suzerainty and in return some of them were given the privilege to stand on the celebrational platform during the Mamankam festival. This policy of the Zamorin was well received by the subordinate chieftains as they could also afford his protection and support in times of war. The governance policies of the Zamorin were not extremely bureaucratic and static but they were evolving. The Zamorins had an effective army and later he even built a powerful navy with support from the Marakkar merchants.

The political stability and authority over various chieftains gave the Zamorin access to the rich spice producing hinterlands which in turn supplemented the trade in the port of Calicut. One of the pre-condition for urbanization of an area was, “the effective extraction of surplus from the adjacent country side while establishing themselves as large centres of specialist craft and manufacture.”<sup>3</sup> Calicut was able to produce calicos and salt and the subordination of various territories led to receiving the various agricultural commodities produced therein. Bustling trade was the indicator that an area could produce and market its surplus in exchange for a variety of commodities including bullion.<sup>4</sup> Once rulers realized the benefits received from trade, they set about to increase their benefits by providing facilities and creating a favorable environment for trade. Thus, we see how the Zamorin allowed the evolution of the mercantile part of Calicut to develop as a cosmopolitan and secular town wherein people of all faiths and regions could come and trade and no one was restricted. Merchants also had a good relationship with the rulers as we see in the case of the Arab merchants in Calicut. The Zamorin was ready to take up arms in order to protect them from the Portuguese. This kind of influence which the Arab merchants had on the Zamorin was of great surprise to the Europeans whose only aim was to monopolize the trade and rob these areas of their surplus. Their idea of trade was

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<sup>3</sup> Lakshmi Subramaniam, (ed.) *Ports, Towns, Cities: A Historical Tour of the Indian Littoral*, p.12

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12

exclusively for their benefit while the Zamorin and his mercantile collaborators were aiming at achieving benefits mutually.<sup>5</sup>

Trade also contributed to the spread of new ideas. The traders from far and wide came down not only with their commodities but also in turn influenced the people. We saw the influence of the Arab merchants on the population in Calicut. The city of Calicut was a link between the Indian Ocean littoral and the hinterland as it showcased the richness of the hinterland to the commercial world of the Indian Ocean. Due to the inter mingling, a mixed population evolved Thus, contributing to another character of an area being termed as a city.

Calicut can be termed to evolve as a port city as it was the trade in Calicut that was the major stimulant for its growth and development as an urban enclave. From the beginning the Zamorins wanted to capture Calicut, owing to the trade benefits and once it was brought under their control, they set about capturing more territories in order to accumulate more commodities for exchange at the port. The variety of commodities available at a port, the greater the number of traders arriving at the port and in turn the greater variety of goods that could be purchased. Abd der Razzak writes that anything one desires can be found in this port.<sup>6</sup> We have observed how trade was a motivating factor for the Zamorin in his political expeditions. Even in later years as the European powers came in, the Zamorin fought to maintain his hold over the trade in Calicut.

According to Lakshmi Subramaniam, “A port city is a complex formation as geographers use it to describe a city that is located at a port, and a city whose main economic basis for non-local or export markets is its port. The preponderance of maritime functions- exchange, enterprise and transport- distinguishes it from other urban formations and distinguishes it from cities of the hinterland that may owe their

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<sup>5</sup> Lakshmi Subramaniam, (ed.) *Ports, Towns, Cities: A Historical Tour of the Indian Littoral*, pp.12, 15

<sup>6</sup> R H Major, *India in the Fifteenth Century*, p. 19

specific culture to other sets of dynamics, sacral, and or secular power.”<sup>7</sup> We can notice these above characteristics in Calicut as it was mainly dependent on its status as a port to imbibe urban characters. The development of Calicut as a port led to its development as a city. We can notice the difference between Tirunavaye which was located in the interior of Calicut. The fact that it was the site of the Mamankam festival held every twelve years gave it a ritual significance and this led it to be a centre of bustling trade and inter-mingling of people. The presence of sacred sites was the stimulant for Tirunavaye to imbibe an urban nature. However, at Calicut it was different. The presence of the port was the guiding factor for urbanization.

Calicut is said to have been the picture of cosmopolitanism at work. However, we need to question how far reaching were the effects that the mercantile town of Calicut exhibited? While the commodities produced in various areas reached Calicut, did the ideas propagated here reach the hinterlands? Were the hinterlands exploited only for serving a commercial purpose and to augment the authority of the king but were left behind in terms of achieving an acceptance to different castes and faiths within these interior areas? Did the cosmopolitan and secular ideas propagated by the Zamorin reach these areas and were they transformed to some extent? Also to what extent was cosmopolitanism at work in Calicut itself?

While such a beautiful picture of medieval Calicut as a port exhibiting cosmopolitanism is painted, one needs to probe further and see whether such a uniform and perfect picture existed in reality. While cosmopolitanism is a relatively new concept, medieval Calicut has often been the example of the pre-modern cosmopolitan urban space.<sup>8</sup> However, we cannot completely affix this character to the city without considering the deeper aspects which are not spoken about. Archa N G writes, “Unless we dwell on the history of the nature of community-living in the city, the questions of how the city-space negotiated with the ethnic, caste, religious and

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<sup>7</sup> Lakshmi Subramaniam, (ed.) *Ports, Towns, Cities: A Historical Tour of the Indian Littoral*, p.12

<sup>8</sup> Archa N G, ‘Guest Editorial: Cosmopolitanism in a City: The Past and Present of Calicut’, *Café Dissensus*. (Weblink: <https://cafedissensus.com/2016/02/15/guest-editorial-cosmopolitanism-in-a-city-the-past-and-present-of-Calicut/>)

gender barriers over time or how the idea of cosmopolitanism changed over time cannot be addressed.”<sup>9</sup>

While a picture of unity and harmony is painted by scholars, we see certain aspects in the writings of travellers that disturb this peaceful picture. Barbosa while writing about the caste hierarchies and the two groups into which the castes are divided, mentions that “the upper castes ‘do not associate (with) nor do they touch’ members of the other group. These castes believed that they would be polluted by the presence as well as the touch of the lower castes”.<sup>10</sup> Barbosa mentions about various lower castes in Calicut. About the *Puler* he writes, “They do not speak to the Nairs, except from a long way off, as far as they can be heard speaking with a loud voice.....And whatsoever woman or man should touch these, their relations immediately kill them like a contaminated thing: and they kill so many of these *Pulers* until they are weary of it, without any penalty.”<sup>11</sup> He mentions regarding another lower caste, *Pareni*, “They are looked upon as worse than the devil, and as altogether condemned, so that by looking at them only they consider themselves as defiled and excommunicated, which they call contaminated.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, we see that while the mercantile part of the city could be called cosmopolitan, these effects were not far reaching. The local inhabitants remained static in their beliefs and did not budge despite the diversity of trade networks that were converging in Calicut.

Barbosa mentions about the Nair women, that they were not allowed to enter the town except once in a year. He writes, “On that night more than twenty thousand Nair women enter Calicut to see the town, which is full of lamps in all the streets, which the inhabitants set there to do honour to the Nairs...”<sup>13</sup> We see that the upper caste women were restricted to their living spaces. As Archa N G writes, “The caste and gender hierarchies in an urban space seemed not to have disturbed the existing notion of cosmopolitanism in Calicut.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, we see that often we look on the

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<sup>9</sup> Archa N G, ‘Guest Editorial: Cosmopolitanism in a City: The Past and Present of Calicut’

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Dale, ‘Communal Relations in Pre-Modern India: 16<sup>th</sup> century Kerala’, p.320

<sup>11</sup> Henry E J Stanley, *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar*, p.143

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.143-44

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.130

<sup>14</sup> Archa N G, ‘Cosmopolitanism in a City: The Past and Present of Calicut’

surface and arrive at conclusions rather than inspecting the nuances involved. Indeed features of cosmopolitanism were found in the mercantile part of Calicut but it did not penetrate caste and gender hierarchies.

While the aspect of cosmopolitanism was found in areas where the traders interacted and conducted their activities, the effects of these were not translated in their living spaces. We cannot negate that there were no effects as it was “a city where cultures, religions, social and political practices from all over the world have met, influenced each other and mingled...”<sup>15</sup> However, we cannot paint a picture of complete uniformity in the effects of cosmopolitanism at work in Calicut.

Instead of taking for granted that Calicut was cosmopolitan on the whole, we can say that medieval Calicut was a space where cosmopolitanism was at work. “It addresses the two aspects of cosmopolitanism at the same time. First it is the idea of cosmopolitanism itself which is at work. It has its historical origin and it challenges the society in Kerala until today: to cross borders and barriers between religious communities, between nations, classes, caste and gender. Secondly it describes the uneven, messy and incomplete side of cosmopolitanism.”<sup>16</sup> It showcases that the gaining of a cosmopolitan nature is an “ongoing process of circulation and of entanglements of people, goods, knowledge and ideas”.<sup>17</sup>

Historians also write extensively about the harmonious relationship shared between the Zamorins and the Muslim traders. The Zamorin’s friendship with the Portuguese was not taken lightly by the Muslim traders and in 1596, the Zamorin laid the foundation for building a church. This antagonized the Muslims as Christian missionaries even started advising the Zamorin. The harmonious relationship the Marakkar traders had with the Zamorin started breaking down henceforth and this led to the city of Calicut becoming the scene of Christian-Muslim conflict.<sup>18</sup> The last straw was the treachery committed by the Zamorin against Kunjali Marakkar by

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<sup>15</sup> Barbara Riedel, ‘Cosmopolitanism at Work on the Malabar Coast of South India- a study with Muslim students in Kozhikode’, p. 40(Weblink: [https://www2.hu-berlin.de/transcience/Vol4\\_Issue2\\_2013\\_36\\_49.pdf](https://www2.hu-berlin.de/transcience/Vol4_Issue2_2013_36_49.pdf))

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.45

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 45

<sup>18</sup> Kunhali V, *Calicut in History*, p. 50

handing him over to the Portuguese who eventually killed him; the Muslims started losing trust in the Zamorin. The Zamorin also eventually regretted his decision.

Calicut city, when observed with a bird's eye view gives us an idea of a city where harmony existed between every section of the society and wherein everyone was respected despite their backgrounds. However, on looking beyond the surface we realise that there was more to this manifestation of peace and cooperation than what meets the eye. There are non-uniformities. A clean picture cannot be painted by whitewashing off the irregularities involved. As historians it is our job to be objective and hence showcase a society that went through the same tensions as we do today. Urbanity is a complex aspect and it is not something that can be achieved in entirety. It's an ongoing process wherein there are conflicts and tensions involved and not a completely peaceful process. Often the character of cosmopolitanism in urban spaces also changes which Thus, adds a new dimension. Hence never can we address any place as completely cosmopolitan in nature. It's always better to address as an area where more positive effects of cosmopolitanism at work are seen rather than giving it an image of perfection.

Indeed, in the city of Calicut too, we can say that we can see that the aspect of cosmopolitanism is seen a little more clearly than in other port cities of that time. In Calicut the different communities were brought together as a resource. The concept of social capital can be utilised in the case of Calicut. "Social capital can be defined as social groups, networks which foster cooperation among individuals, forming a resource, which members of such organisations or larger collectivities could draw upon for uses of different nature."<sup>19</sup> Thus, in Calicut we see that the process of accepting each other was an attempt to foster collaboration between different sections to promote trade interests. The sense of cosmopolitanism which arose can Thus, be traced to "the business ethics of a city whose past and present is utterly intertwined with commerce."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Pius Malekandathil, 'Societal Process and a Mercantile City: A Study on the Town of Calicut', p.1

<sup>20</sup> Osella, F and Osella, Caroline, 'I am Gulf: The Production of Cosmopolitanism among the Koyas of Kozhikode, Kerala', p.16 (weblink: [eprints.soas.ac.uk/5178](http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/5178))

Thus, as historians let us have an in depth look at the underlying features that led to certain characters arising and manifested in certain areas rather than just making our conclusions based on what is visible to the eye. Cosmopolitanism in Calicut was at work as long as it promoted the interests of the communities involved, However, this character failed to impact the communities in a larger sense and hence it would not be correct to identify Calicut as a cosmopolitan city but it should be seen as one wherein the principles of cosmopolitanism were definitely at work.

Calicut did evolve as a famed port city in the medieval times. It was a safe harbour but we cannot paint a picture which is completely clean and devoid of imperfections. The urbanization process was not uniform but it was the product of several constructive and destructive aspects. The policies of the Zamorin to attract foreign trade and the immense flow of wealth from commerce led to emergence of urban characters in Calicut and he fought to maintain the city as per his vision. However, the coming of the Europeans altered the trading atmosphere of the city because of their coercive interventions and undid the positive effect of many of his policies. None of the Europeans could However, gain monopoly over the trade. In the end too, Calicut had to surrender to Hyder Ali but it was after a period of maintaining their superiority for long. The fall of Calicut did create a huge vacuum in the commercial and urban map of Kerala.

It is a matter of pride that despite the repeated attempts of the European powers, none of them could ever capture Calicut and its trade in its entirety. The Zamorin tried various methods to maintain the superiority and independence of Calicut and it is worth mentioning that Calicut was one of the ports on the Malabar Coast that fought foreign domination successfully and resisted effectively their forceful entry into India.

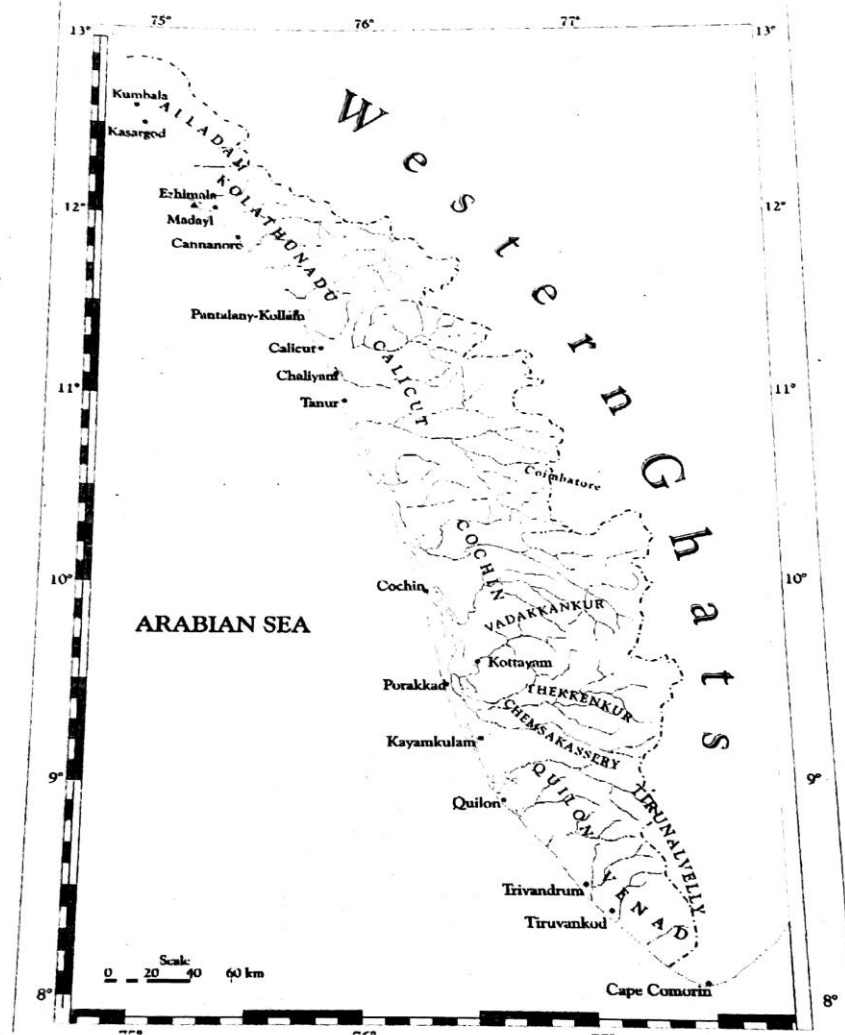
Thus, in conclusion, Calicut and the study of the urbanization process at work therein helps us to understand the importance of how having a clear aim and working towards it can benefit the society in unprecedented ways. The Zamorin was interested in maintaining his superiority and extracting the benefits of trade and in turn he set rolling the wheels of early modernity through various institutions of culture and by



propelling forces for cultural and literary production of an unprecedented scale and degree. Market oriented commodity production increased, many cultural forms developed as a result of the Zamorin's policies to augment his authority and even the society experienced many changes in its composition and character due to the stimulation given to its trade-related endeavours.

# MAP

Map 1 Seventeenth-Century Kerala



Cartography: Ole Husmann, Freiburg, Germany

**FIGURE 1.1: Seventeenth Century Kerala**  
**SOURCE:** Binu J. Mailaparambil, *Lords of the Sea*, p.ix.

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