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**MEDIEVAL CALICUT
AN EXAMPLE OF
HINDU-MUSLIM FRATERNITY
IN CULTURE**

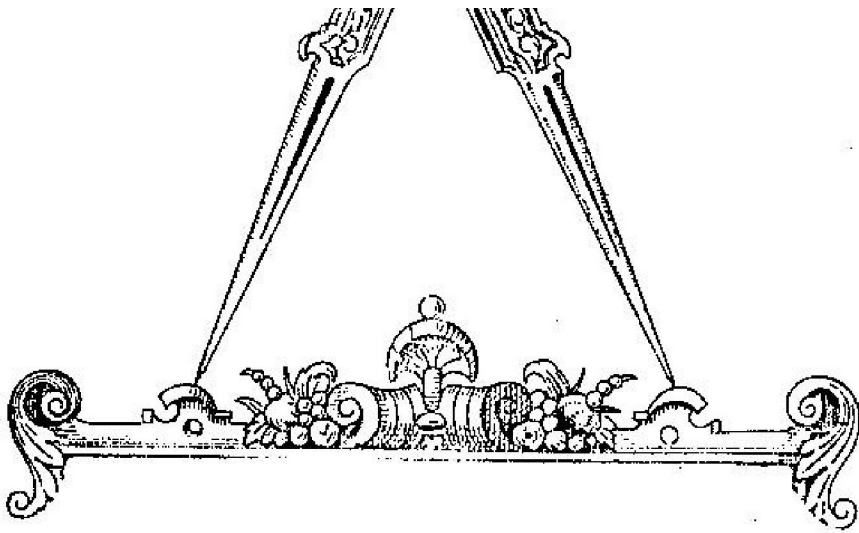
*"Calicut is the busiest and
most full of all traffic and commerce
in the whole of India...."*

*Author investigates on the rise of
the ancient city,
"the meeting place of nations."*

The rise of Calicut as an international harbour, a meeting point between the East and the West is a good proof of the ability of the Indian people to achieve a creative synthesis of different creeds, social systems and cultures. Manavikrama, the chief of Ernad who was one of the governors under Cherman Perumals, appears to have been a favourite of the last Perumal, Ramakulashekhar. This is borne out by the reference to him as first of the samantas or feudatory governors, in stone inscription of Kollam. (Quilon) in south Kerala. Following a dispute with the Aryas (Brahmins) the last Perumal had to leave the country. Both the Hindu Brahmanical tradition enshrined in Kerala history and the Muslim tradition

as represented by Shakh Zainuddin's Tulfathul Mujahirdeen, tell us that the last Perumal embraced Islam and left for Makkah. Circumstantial evidence would go to confirm it. There is a contemporary Cola statement that he was pushed into the sea. Kavismha Alupa of Thulunadu and Udayavarman of Kolathunad, mentioned in Kerala history in this connection, are known to be historical figures. It is also found that Madayi mosque, one of the ten mosques established by Malik ibin Dinar, a messenger of the last Perumal from Makkah, had a plaque which declared the Hijra year 518 corresponding to 1124 A.D. as the year of its foundation. The last known year of the last Perumal is 1122 A.D. Within a couple of years after this the governors of Venad and other districts are known to have assumed independence.

Thus the beginning of the 12th century A.D. witnessed the disappearance of a central authority and the struggle of the petty-successor states of the Chera Kingdom for survival and supremacy. The governor of Ernad turned out to be the most successful in this contest for power and remained so for about seven centuries until the advent of the Mysorean army in the middle of the 18th century which led to a complete change in the Socio-political set up and was followed by the establishment of the British power in Kerala.



The emergence of the Kingdom of Kozhikode as the virtual successor of the Kingdom of the Chera Perumals came about as the result of a combination of several factors. There was growing European demand for the hill products of Kerala like pepper and the scents and spices due to the revival of prosperity in Italian cities like Florence, Naples and Venice. The Arabs and the Egyptians acted as the carriers of this trade and were searching for safe harbours and strong allies on Western India. The erstwhile governors of Ernad, called Eradis of Nedyiruppu were the earliest to sense the value of this opportunity and realise the full potential of this western maritime trade. They moved from the inland into Kozhikode, known to Arabs and the world later as Calicut, the small, saltish, marshy strip of land presented by the last Perumal as a parting gift, and built a fort there. They patronised the native trading community of the Chettis — leaders of trade guild known as 'Sreshtins' in sanskrit and called Vari-ously as seths in Gujarat, Settars in Karnataka and Chettis in Tamilnadu under the leadership of one Ambarasan Chetty and encouraged them to settle down in streets around the fort area. Thus the foundations were laid well but Kozhikode in the twelfth century was yet only one of the many struggling ports at the centre of a very small principality in Western India; Kodungal- lur was still the major port of Kerala and Kollam (Quilon) was the second in importance.

A really significant step in the rise of Calicut was the arrival, according to Kerala[pathi], of a Muslim trader from the island of Maskiyatt. He was the elder of the two sons of a wealthy merchant who asked him to find a good place to settle down as he feared that the sons might fight each other for their patrimony after his own time. The young trader deposited sealed jars of gold, deceptively labelled as pickles for safe custody in the courts of several princes. When he claimed them back after a year it was found that all of them except those in Kozhikode, contained only pickles. Therefore he chose Calicut, the harbour of the honest prince, for his own residence. This motif has been found in the local traditions in other centres also and need not be taken in the literal sense. However, the arrival of 'Masklyan' might have been a historical event as we find an old mosque called 'Muchiyante Palli' built in early medieval style, and containing a bilingual inscription of about the 12th or 13th century, in the heart of Muslim settlement of Kozhikode. The record in 'Vatteluthu' and Arabic, the only stone inscription of the Zamorins found in their capital, speaks of an endowment of land by the Hindu ruler to the mosque.

The traditional chronicle says that the Muslim trader was patronised by the king and given the title of Kozhikottu Koya, this term 'Koya' being a variation of 'Koja' or Qwaja. He was also designated as Shah Bandar Koya since he

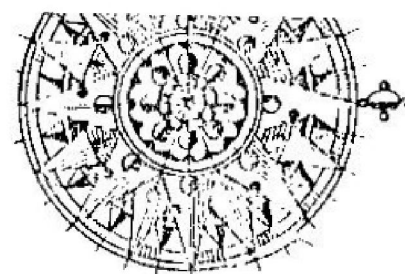
was appointed as the farmer of cus- toms in the Bandar or port on behalf of the Zamorin of Calicut. It was at Koya's Instance that the Zamorin moved southwards to Ponnani which became a second harbour and a second capital to him, in a bid to conquer the fertile river valley of Bharathappuzha and assume the pres- identship of the famous traditional twelve-yearly festival at Tirunavaya. This festival, called Maha Magha, or Mamaka as it was conducted in the month of Magha (Kumba, or January), once in twelve years when the planet Jupiter completed a cycle saw the congregation of all the scholars, nobles and traders in Kerala. Historians have often described the Mamaka as though it was primarily a grand religi- ous - assembly or venue for the trial of strength between the warriors of the Zamorin of Calicut and the Valluvanad Raja. Actually these twelve yearly festivals on the important river banks of India — Haridwar, Ujjain, Dwaraka, Prayag, Kumbakonam etc. — functioned in the same way as modern trade fairs and industrial exhibitions, offering a site for the exhibition and exchange of commodities. This is very clear in the case of Kerala from the Mamankam Kilippattu and other chronicles. These festivals were con- ducted under the protection of the most powerful chieftains of the region for obvious reasons and vested with a religious halo as in the case of other medieval institutions and practices. Therefore it is only natural that the Arab Muslim settler with an eye on sea trade, looked forward to get the presidentship of this gathering for his own patron so that he would be in a position to control and command the resources of interal trade in Kerala. The Zamorin proceeded along the land and the Koya took his navy along the sea and seized the land and the presidentship from the Raja of Val- luvanad by force.

As a mark of gratitude, the Zamorin of Calicut used to permit the Koya to stand on his right side on the occasion of ceremonial parade at Tirunavaya.

The capture of the Mamankam might have taken place sometime in the 14th or early 15th century. Ever since that time until the last Mamankam in 1756 A.D., a few determined warriors belonging to six families of hereditary body guards of the Valluvanad Raja used to appear as a suicide squad in a vain attempt to avenge the loss of the Raja's right which they saw as the outcome of unjust employment of force. However, in spite of this moral protest which provided the star attraction and spectacle of Mamankam, the trade fair was carried on and it became an index of the power and prosperity of the Zamorins of Calicut in central Kerala. The Zamorins who collected huge amounts of revenue from the festival were able to maintain the biggest army in Kerala and subjugate all the neighbouring princes exercising his suzerainty from Kolathunad to Venad, almost all over the territory formerly under the sway of the Chera Perumals of Kodungallur or Makotai. Eventually the great Chinese trade with the Eastern coast of India which had stopped with Kollam (Quilon) in South Kerala extended northwards to Calicut and established an effective link with the western trade. There are several Chinese accounts including those of Chienho and Mahuan which give details of the venture. They went North upto Calicut in the period of 14th to 17th centuries and using Calicut as a base, they sailed to Egypt and Arabia in the pursuit of trade. It is interesting to note that a Japanese team under the leadership of Prof. Noberu

Karashima of the university of Tokyo which included Dr. M.R. Raghava Varier of the Calicut university has recently explored the west coast in January 1989 and their findings include all the varieties of medieval Chinese pottery from Panthalayani Kollam, which formed part of the harbour complex of Kozhikode. The western part of this commercial exchange through the Arabian sea, for which also Calicut was a pivotal point is well-documented in several Arab and Persian accounts by scholars from Iban Bututa to Shaikh Zainuddin. These contacts were able to spread the fame of Calicut as a hospitable port with a just and friendly sovereign all over the civilized world and culminated in Vasco de Gama's voyage around the African coast which inaugurated the Gamma epoch of the modern period in the history of Asia.

The firm foundation of all this prosperity was the close alliance between the Arab Muslim traders and the Hindu aristocracy of the Kingdom of Kozhikode. In the Christian west the Zamorin of Calicut was known as a Moorish prince. He guaranteed strict justice to all merchants, Indian and foreign, professing all sorts of creeds and speaking all sorts of languages. Vasco de Gama's men could meet in the streets of Calicut even men who spoke the Portuguese language. In fact it was an Arab merchant from Africa who acted as his guide in the first voyage to India. There was a Chinese street in the city and plenty of Gujaratis, Parsis, Jews, Arabs and Egyptians who had settled in Calicut even before the



advent of the Portuguese.

The words of Pyrard de Zaval (1608 A.D.) which project a meaningful picture of Calicut in the medieval period, is worth reproducing here.

"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, everyone living in great liberty of conscience under the favour of the 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 influence."

....An Astronomical Society has been constituted to promote study of astronomy and to help people to observe celestial objects through the 8" telescope set up on 5-2-74.

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