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## REVIEW ARTICLE

### THE ADVENT OF THE PORTUGUESE AND SOCIO- ECONOMIC TRANSITION IN KERALA

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#### ABSTRACT

A new era in the history of India has begun in 1498, when Vasco Da Gama came in Calicut. It marked a turning point in the history of Kerala. The arrival of Portuguese by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century laid the foundation of colonial occupation in Kerala effecting fundamental changes in all spheres of the society. Their arrival was the beginning of a new era in the history of Travancore. The Portuguese contact influenced more in the economic field. They promoted the scientific cultivation of pepper and ginger. They put an end to the trade monopoly of the Arabs on the Indian coast especially in Malabar. Their aim was to establish trade centers in most of the coastal areas of the Malabar, Cochin, Kollam and Calicut. They promoted agricultural expansion in Travancore and introduced a number of new agricultural products such as tobacco, pineapple, pappaya, cashewnut, plantation, coconut etc. They also played a dominant role in enriching the Indian languages. They founded theological seminaries and colleges at Cochin, Cranganore, Angamali and Vaipincotta for the purpose of training Christian Priests. In short, their period ushered in a revival in the socio-economic and religious environment in Travancore.

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#### INTRODUCTION

The arrival of Portuguese by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century was the beginning of a new era in the history of Travancore. They were the 1<sup>st</sup> Europeans to arrive in Kerala. The landing of Vasco Da Gama at Kappad, Calicut, in May 1498 constituted an important epoch in the history of India in general and Kerala in particular (James Puliurumpil, 2013). Their immediate aim was commercial expansion. The king of Portugal issued specific instructions to this effect and they tried their best to materialize this aim. In course of time they succeeded in building up an empire in India by bringing the local powers under subjections. They established trade centers in most of the coastal areas of Malabar, Cochin, Kollam, Kayamkulam, Purakkad and Calicut. Their contact tremendously influenced all areas of the society especially in the social, cultural, economic, political and religious fields (Sreedhara Menon, 1967).

#### Malabar - A Great Centre of International Trade

Even before the advent of the Portuguese, Malabar was a great centre of internal and external trade (Johnsy Mathews, 1996). Traders from Arabian countries had already established their commercial contacts with India even before the advent of Europeans.

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It had commercial contacts with the countries of the outside world. Commodities from Malabar were carried to various parts of the world especially to China, Persia and Europe. It was the desire for pepper from Malabar that tempted the Europeans to the Kerala coast (Krishnan Nadar). It was cultivated in plenty throughout Malabar. Pepper 'the Black gold of Malabar' was the chief item of export while gold, silver and copper formed the major articles of import to Malabar. Every trader had the freedom to visit any port in Malabar for the sake of trade. Trade during this time was private rather than government concern. The pepper traders received loan from the Portuguese contractors and a great incentive was given to pepper production. The profitable trade in pepper was bound to bring about considerable changes in the Malabar society. Kollam, to the south of Kayamkulam, furnished by betel nuts, coloured cotton stuffs, pearls, coral, butter and jasmine flowers all of which were brought to Kollam. According to Chinese travelers, pearls were brought from Rameswaram to Kollam and then taken to foreign countries (Mathew). As a result, Malabar economy received a powerful impetus and various sections of the population began to engage in different production process. Simultaneously this paved the way for the transition from feudalism to capitalism and the merchant capital had profound influence on the economy and society of Malabar.

#### Socio –Economic Transitions

The Portuguese contributed a great deal to the various sections of the society in Travancore. The local rulers of the Malabar

Coast wanted to take advantage of the commercial facilities offered by the Portuguese. Albuquerque opened up the trade with Kollam and established a factory at Kollam in January 1504 (Kusuman, 1987). The development of Kollam as a township opened new opportunities for employment. People living in the interior places were attracted to Kollam and settled there. Various professional groups began to settle down in and around the port city. As more and more merchants reached the port towns of Cochin and other centers, more houses were to be constructed for the merchants. Houses made of white stones and brick, roofed with lime clay or tiles on the Portuguese fashion, began to be constructed by the Hindu and the Muslim merchants on the coast. Not only warehouses for commercial purposes but also they established monasteries, schools and hospitals which not only served the Portuguese but catered to the needs of the native population too. The Portuguese government took proper care of these centers of charity. All these paved the way for urbanization of Kollam. Gradually their presence witnessed changes in the economic, social and political spheres and thus it changed the course of the history of Kerala. The traditional social relations of Kerala underwent slight changes as a result of the Portuguese intervention. They tried to improve Malayalees totally in their outlook and behavior. By marrying Malayalee women the Portuguese paved the way for a coherent and devoted family life in Kerala. Paternity was given recognition and respect. They encouraged the widow- marriage. The Portuguese contact produced significant changes in the economic field. The advent of the Portuguese put an end to the trade monopoly of the Arabs on the Indian coast especially in Malabar (Ibrahim Kunju, 2007). At the same time, the trade with Europe grew. Trade contacts with Europe also led to the introduction of European fashions and luxuries.

The ornamental architecture and the buildings of the Bungalow type were introduced by the Portuguese on the Malabar Coast. The local powers copied from the Portuguese the European architecture and weapons of warfare. Several towns came into existence and old town decayed during the period of Portuguese trade contact. Most of the crop plants, now in Kerala, are those introduced by the Portuguese. They introduced a number of new agricultural products such as cashew nut, tobacco, pineapple and the papaya. They popularized the Kerala spices like pepper, cardamom and ginger in European markets. The Portuguese also introduced the cultivation of coconut, and coir became an important article of foreign trade from Kollam, Purakkad and Kayamkulam. The Portuguese impact on food habits was the introduction of bread, biscuits, cake etc. Bakery and Restaurants were subsequent development. Soup, roast, cutlet etc are other items that become popular among Malayalees as well as among the Indians. No wonder when Malayalee eats 'putt', the credit goes to the Portuguese. The Portuguese contributed immensely to the various sections of the society in Malabar. There was a very flourishing Portuguese society in Kollam from 1505 onwards. About 190 families resided there with a large number of soldiers and officials to take care of the Portuguese population settled in Kollam.

When the Portuguese came to Malabar the low caste people had no method of enjoyment. Sympathizing over the miserable situation, the Portuguese formulated a method of entertainment for them: the folk drama, chavittunadakam, etc was its outcome. The arrival of catholic missionaries was an event which was destined to add new dimensions to the history of lower strata of the society in Malabar in the sixteenth century. St. Francis Xavier visited Kollam twice, in November 1544 and in March 1549. His purpose was to organize a seminary to train priests, and to educate the lay people of the diocese. Thousands of lower castes were converted to Christianity. This further helped the Christian missionaries to propagate their religious gospels later on. Almost all the Portuguese colonies and towns had hospitals attached to them. In addition to the hospitals, they established schools and destitute homes in all the Portuguese towns. Churches were also established for native Christians as well as the Portuguese. The first Portuguese church to be built on Indian soil was dedicated to Saint Bertolomeu in Cochin, in 1503. They established church in Kozhikode, Cochin and Kollam attached to the factories. Institutions for teaching children to read and write were established in Cochin and Kollam. These institutions helped to spread the knowledge of Latin and Portuguese among the local people. The Portuguese played a dominant role in enriching the Indian languages. They erected printing press named San Salvadore press at Tangasseri near Kollam on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1578. Language is enriched with more than 200 Portuguese words of common use. To facilitate the study of Malayalam language, the Portuguese missionaries composed dictionaries. One of the best examples is Malayalam – Portuguese Dictionary of Earnest Hanxeldan. The words "room, table, bucket, key, varanda, ranthal, Kachari, Kumbasaram etc were from Portuguese language.

## Conclusion

The Portuguese were rightly called the pioneers of modern civilization in Kerala. Their contact resulted in tremendous changes in the political, the economic, social and cultural fields. Though the Portuguese had vanished from the Kerala scene, their hidden presence continues even today. Thus it was a period which anybody can be proud of. Many things which we enjoy now are indeed the Portuguese contribution.

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