

THE PORTUGUESE AND THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGES IN KERALA

1498-1663

James John



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The momentous interaction between Portugal and Kerala commenced with the historic voyage of Vasco da Gama in 1498. It had lasting impact on the society of Kerala. The voyage, with the express purpose of searching for 'Christians and Spices', left longlasting imprint on the life of the people of Kerala.

Though the Portuguese did not have political dominion in Kerala, the political influence they gained in Kerala precipitated a lot of socio-cultural changes. The intensity and degree of these changes were commensurate with the tenor of the Portuguese networking with the diverse socio-cultural traits in Kerala. Those sections of the Kerala society that gained a higher extent of interconnectedness with the Portuguese manifested a higher degree of socio-cultural transition. One of the most significant means for socio-cultural change that the Portuguese employed in Kerala was ecclesiastical legislation. This cultural interface between Portugal and Kerala resulted in multiple fissions and fusions in the society of Kerala.

This book delves deep into the multifarious interaction between the two communities and the consequent socio-cultural changes that Kerala witnessed during 1498-1663, the period when Portuguese influence was at its acme.

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Socio-Cultural Changes in Kerala
1498-1663

JAMES JOHN



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Foreword

India, in general and south India in particular, for the first time, came into contact with Europe with the opening of the direct sea-route connecting coastal India with the Atlantic regions towards the close of the fifteenth century. The dynamics of the monsoons compelled the Portuguese to establish factories, fortresses and settlements in various parts of coastal India. Besides, in course of time, the Portuguese missionaries took efficient steps to convert the local people to Christianity embedded in European culture, besides making strenuous efforts to make the existing Catholics conform themselves with the Western religious practices. The political domination in places under the Portuguese jurisdiction and the ecclesiastical authority claimed by them under the Royal *Padroado* rights provided them with opportunities to enact rules and regulations binding the members of Indian society to follow European customs and manners. A milieu of this nature opened up the avenue for cultural interactions between the Portuguese and the local society. It must be said that the 'give and take' process found in such interactions has not been very strong in the case of the Portuguese interactions with the local society. As a result, a lot of changes in the day-to-day life of the local people were brought about thanks to the Portuguese contacts.

Some of the social practices in vogue among the local Catholics were proscribed by legislations promulgated by the Portuguese through the provincial councils of Goa and specifically through the decrees of the Synod of Diamper. A study of these attempts will offer an opportunity to learn the indigenous practices that were found

among the local Catholics before the arrival of the Portuguese on the Malabar Coast. The author has made an attempt to bring to light the nature of society in Kerala before the Portuguese came to India and to highlight the process of changes in the light of the Portuguese legislations.

The author's familiarity with the Portuguese language enabled him to consult the original and contemporary sources in Portuguese, especially the decrees of the provincial Councils of Goa and those of the Diamper Synod. Most of the synodal decrees were implemented among the local Catholics on account of the Portuguese authority in the ecclesiastical life. The Catholics in Malabar were kept away from the local traditions being in vogue for centuries together. Thus, the local Catholics began to preserve an identity of their own in view of the insistence of the Portuguese authorities in the Church from the commencement of the seventeenth century.

The present study will help students of history identify the changes brought about through the contacts with the Portuguese and realize that the Kerala culture is not monolithic, but a cultural mosaic in which various aspects of different cultures have been amalgamated. It is hoped that the author will bring out further studies on the history of India in general and of Kerala in particular based on the Portuguese documents.

K.S. MATHEW

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It was Prof. Dr. K.S. Mathew, former Professor of History at Pondicherry University and my Research Supervisor who initiated me into Indo-Portuguese history, encouraged and supported me at every stage of my research, opened his vast treasury of knowledge through discussions and suggestions and allowed me to make use of the invaluable depository of his personal collection of sources. Besides he has blessed me with a generous and scholarly Foreword for this book. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to my *Guru*.

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I owe a lot to His Eminence Cardinal Manuel Clemente, Patriarch of Lisbon, Mto. Rev. Sr. Congo. Pe. Francisco José Tito Espinheira, Vicar General of Lisbon, Père Loiseau of Paroisse Saint Donatien Nantes, Prof. Luis Felipe Thomaz who opened his personal library for my studies, Fr. Xavier Vettikuzhichalil, Dr. Geneviève Bouchon, Prof. Afzal Ahmad, Mlle. Françoise Coquenlorge, Dona Luisa, Dona Mariana, Dona Mimi, Mrs. Angela Ivette Noronha for the assistance they extended to me at various stages of my research. My gratitude and indebtedness to my parents, Mr. M.C. John Mangalathu and Mrs. Rosamma John and my family members is also acknowledged. My gratitude is also due to my colleagues at St. Thomas College, Palai, all my friends, and well-wishers for their support and encouragement. The constant support and encouragement of all the former managers and principals of St. Thomas College, Palai is worth mentioning.

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JAMES JOHN

Abbreviations

A.N.T.T.	Archivo Nacional da Tõrre do Tombo
A.H.U.	Archivo Histórico Ultramarino
B. A.	Biblioteca da Ajuda
B.L.	British Library
B.N.F	Bibliothèque Nationale de France
B.N.L	Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa
H.A.G.	The Historical Archives of Goa
Mal.	Malayalam Language
N.D.	No Date



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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Orient and the Occident are two different worlds of existence and expression. During the middle ages, the contact between the two became negligible. With the geographical discoveries in the pre-modern period the interest of the Occident in the Orient increased. During the middle of the second millennium closer ties between the two worlds were revived once again. The interaction between the East and the West has been an important theme of historical reflection in recent years.

Portugal, a tiny country in the Iberian Peninsula, took lead in this endeavour of establishing contacts with the oriental world that was known for its religious mysticism and luxuries including the much-needed spices. Portugal's dream project to gain supremacy over the seas of the East by doing away with the monopolistic trade of the East by the Muslims was realized with the finding of a direct sea-route to India. Thus a new phase of interaction between the East and the West began. Malabar, which was the spice-growing strip of land, became the first focal point of Portuguese activities in India. The socio-cultural change in Kerala¹ that took place as a result of Portuguese interaction is the theme of the present work. It envisages the study of the concepts like society, culture, socio-cultural changes, acculturation, subcultures and culture patterns.

Nick Mansfield defines society as 'a structured unit of individuals with common characteristics and bonds'.² It means that society is a web of relationships in which each corresponds to the needs of

the other members. So the society of a given period is the web of interrelationship that exists among various individuals and social groups of a specific geographical area and at a particular epoch of time.

The term 'culture' has different shades of meaning. For the ordinary man culture is a refined way of life. Accordingly, culture is in the domain of the elite, elegant and literate folks.³ This definition throws the illiterate outside the domain of culture.

Frank R. Vivaldo adds 'totalist' and 'mentalist' view to the definition of culture.⁴ The 'totalist view' of culture interrelates a social group's self-concept, its belief system and the instruments and mechanisms it uses to achieve its goals and perpetuate itself.⁵ This view holds that culture is an interaction between who we are and what we have. The 'mentalist view' of culture maintains that it is a thing of mind shared by the members of the group. It is an ideational or conceptual system.⁶ According to this view, as it is a conceptual system, material elements do not come within the purview of culture. Therefore the 'mentalist view' is not acceptable. A more comprehensive definition in the 'totalist line' is given by Raymond Williams. He defines culture as the whole way of life of the people.⁷ Culture, being a mode of living proper to a society includes elements like language, customs, habits, techniques, beliefs, ideas, attitudes, religions, material culture and values.⁸ If culture is the way of life of the people it is not something normative but positive.

Culture cannot exist in a vacuum. It requires some form of structure for existence. It is the social structure that contains culture.⁹ Though society and culture are closely related, both are distinct. The former is the 'patterns of association and relations through which persons influence or motivate one another'¹⁰ whereas the latter comprises 'certain products of these regulations in the form of communicable values, norms and standards'.¹¹

The basic unit of culture is called *cultural trait*. There could be quite a few cultural traits in a culture. A group of related traits is called a *culture pattern*. The higher unit of culture above culture pattern is *subculture*.¹² A subculture is a 'group within society that

contravenes the prescribed norms and values of the larger group, yet lives within the confines of the overall society'.¹³

Social organism, just like a biological organism, undergoes change. Society always seeks a balance. But due to internal and external pressures, society may seek a new balance. This leads to social changes. 'Social change refers to the intelligible process in which we can discover significant alterations in the structure and functioning of determinate social system.'¹⁴ So social change could be understood as a variation from accustomed interaction patterns. But social change is not a total change. Continuity and change go hand in hand. No society can change totally ignoring its roots. Together with the variations in the accustomed interaction patterns, changes also happen in the culture, which is the ultimate expression of the way of life of a society.

According to M.N. Srinivas, one of the eminent and contemporary sociologists of India, the two means of social change in India are 'Sanskritization' and 'Westernization'.¹⁵ In 'Sanskritization', in order to raise their social position, especially for an upward mobility in the caste hierarchy, members of the lower castes adopt some customs of the Brahmins and give up some of their own which were considered impure by the higher castes.¹⁶ 'Westernization' is 'the change brought about in Indian society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule'.¹⁷

The spreading process of the cultural traits and patterns from the society in which it is born is called 'cultural diffusion'.¹⁸ Social changes initiated by external agents like the people of the West, may lead to acculturation and assimilation. Acculturation is 'the learning of accepted cultural ways and giving up of old ways by new members of the culture'.¹⁹ In acculturation, one group takes on the characteristics of the other giving up most or all of their cultural ways.²⁰ It is usually the result of prolonged contacts between two cultures. In many cases it is the result of conquests. Assimilation is 'the process by which one group diffuses and comes to share common characteristics with another'.²¹ This usually happens in the case of the immigrants. The process of assimilation will lead to the disappearance of the minority group.²²

When acculturation takes place as a result of Western influence in the line of colonialism, it involves different stages. In this process there is a 'host culture'²³ and a 'guest culture'.²⁴ The stages through which this gradual penetration passes are:

(i) *Occasional visits* in which the members of the guest culture come either individually or in groups to the host culture without the intention of staying for a long time. Travellers and pilgrims are examples for this category. The contacts of the guest culture during such visits are mainly with the creamy layer of the society like rulers, nobles or religious leaders.

(ii) *Prolonged stay*: This stage is dominated by the desire of the members of the guest culture for a prolonged stay. This may be motivated either by religious or commercial purposes. If it is motivated by religious purpose, the 'guest culture' will be accompanied by missionaries of the religion and if it is with a commercial motive, with the instruments of commerce. Here the scope of contacts is extended to the common people.

(iii) *Creation of sphere of influence*: In this stage members of the guest culture will require the support of the ruling classes to serve their religious or commercial purpose. As they are not in a position to obtain political power, they create pockets of influence exploiting the weaknesses of the ruling classes promising them material benefits or political power. Once the rulers become prey to these temptations, making use of the influence they have created on the ruler, the guest culture will work to obtain its ulterior motives. This stage is dominated by cunning alliances and promises of military and economic aids. Once they create a sphere of influence in a particular territory, the number of the members of guest culture increases substantially in that territory.

(iv) *Pockets of self-government*: In this stage, the guest culture, either through alliances or military action or through contracts with rulers of its sphere of influence conducts territorial conquests and establish its own system of government subject to the supreme authority of its mother country. Once the 'guest culture' reaches this stage, it will do anything, including the use of force, to satisfy its economic and religious objectives making use of the power it has.

The quest for maintaining their own territory, and influences and to exert pressure on the natives, the number of the members of the 'guest culture' will be considerably increased, especially the number of military class and missionaries will be increased with a view to maintaining law and order and evangelization purposes respectively.

(v) *Supreme power of a region or country*: This is the stage of full-fledged colonialism and imperialism in which the legislative, executive and judicial powers of the host culture are exclusively in the hands of the guest culture.

In all these stages there will be reaction from the part of the host culture. The reaction can be both positive and negative. There will be a section opposing the penetration and influence of the alien cultural elements just as there will be another section which supports the alien culture in spite of occasional differences. The basic reason behind the conflict between cultures is ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is 'the belief that our own particular cultural ways are superior to others'.²⁵

In each of the above stages, we can notice some cultural changes resulting from the interaction, perhaps except in the first. The acculturation affects the society according to the intensity of the interaction and also according to the response of the society under interaction. The socio-cultural changes will be intensive if the interaction is exhaustive and the pace of change will be less if the interaction is minimal. The nature of change also depends upon the strength and response of the society under interaction. If the society under interaction (host culture) is stronger, the response of the acculturation will be fission and a fusion in the society whereas, if the host culture is submissive there will be more changes in the society in the line of the guest culture.

In this volume we deal with acculturation that happened in Kerala as a result of Westernization initiated by the interaction between Portuguese and Kerala societies. In this work, Kerala society is taken as a macro-cultural unit, different religious groups it contains as subcultures and different *varnas* and *jatis* in each subculture as culture patterns. In the interaction between the Portuguese and the Indian societies, the above stages can be found. In the first stage

we see the Portuguese travellers and discoverers like João Peres de Covilhão²⁶ who came to India to get more information about trade, trade routes and religion of India and Vasco da Gama,²⁷ the discoverer of India. Both did not have the intention of staying in India for a longer period. In the second phase we see the arrival of Pedro Alvares Cabral²⁸ with necessary instruments and personnel for a permanent stay for economic and religious purposes. In the third stage, making use of the enmity, disunity, superiority and inferiority complexes of the native rulers, the Portuguese established pockets of self-government in Cannanore and Cochin. In the fourth phase, through territorial conquests, the Portuguese obtained territories like Goa where they implanted their own system of administration. But they never crossed the fourth stage in India. As the guest culture advances from the first stage to the following, the degree of acculturation intensifies and reaches its zenith with the fifth stage. In Malabar the Portuguese hardly crossed the third stage. For, the Portuguese had only a few settlements and factories in Malabar and they were not always under the full political power of the Portuguese. The native rulers had some control over them.

Though a few studies have been done regarding the Indo-Portuguese relations of this period, many of them focus on the political, economic and religious spheres of Portuguese activity in Malabar.

One of the earlier studies in this regard has been A. Mathias Mundadan's *The St. Thomas Christians of Malabar under Mar Jacob (1498-1552)*.²⁹ It deals with the contacts of the St. Thomas Christians with the Portuguese during the episcopate of Mar Jacob. It is a work which makes use of a lot of Portuguese as well as indigenous sources. But it deals only with the St. Thomas Christians of that period. Another book of the same author entitled *Traditions of St. Thomas Christians*,³⁰ discusses various traditions of the St. Thomas Christians. The second part of the book gives a detailed survey of the traditions of St. Thomas Christians up to the time of the arrival of the Portuguese. This is also a historico-anthropological study about the St. Thomas Christians. Another important work done in this line is *Os Portugueses no Malabar (1498-1580)*, by José Manuel Correia. It is a useful work on the Portuguese activities in

Malabar. But as the scope of the work is limited to a rather short period 1498-1580 many changes could not be brought out in the work. The doctoral thesis of Jonas Thaliath entitled *The Synod of Diamper* is a serious research, which deals with the feasibility and the validity of Synod of Diamper which the Portuguese authors like Gouveia uphold as the greatest achievement of the Portuguese missionaries in Malabar.³¹ The scope of this study is limited only to the historical background and the juridical validity of the Synod. Geneviève Bouchon's French work *Mamale de Cananor: Un adversaire de l'Inde portugaise (1507-1528)*, is a work which portrays the native resistance to the Portuguese on the part of the Muslims of Malabar especially the Marakkars.³² *The St. Thomas Christians' Revolution* written by Jacob Kollaparampil³³ is a well-researched treatise on the ecclesiastical history of Malabar during the Portuguese period. Then the PhD thesis of Joseph Thekkedath entitled 'Troubled Days of Francis Garcia S.J., Archbishop of Cranganore (1641-59)'³⁴ gives the history of the St. Thomas Christians of Malabar during the middle of the seventeenth century through the personality of Archbishop Francis Garcia. He has consulted a mass of Portuguese sources for the study of this period. Another work by the same author is *The History of Christianity in India: From the Middle of the Sixteenth to the End of the Seventeenth Century (1542-1700)*, vol. II.³⁵ This covers the entire Portuguese period but confines itself to the area of ecclesiastical history. The Doctoral thesis of Pius Malekandathil published as *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India: 1500-1663*³⁶ deals with the urban development of Portuguese Cochin. This is a well-researched book on the basis of various primary evidences kept in various depositories around the world. But the thesis is mainly concerned with the urban development and trade. The book edited by Prof. K.S. Mathew entitled *The Portuguese and the Socio-Cultural Changes in India, 1500-1800*,³⁷ deals with various aspects of socio-cultural changes consequent to the Portuguese interaction in India. As it is an edited work on the basis of the proceedings of an international seminar, it contains a lot of vacuum and gives room for further research on the socio-cultural changes in Malabar.

The present treatise is the result of an attempt to shed light on

Malabar society of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries against the backdrop of socio-cultural relationships and consequent transformation that occurred in the society due to the interaction with the Portuguese society. Most of the previous works concentrated on commercial or ecclesiastical aspect. This study envisages more emphasis on socio-cultural aspects without laying stress on the trade aspect of the Portuguese period in Malabar.

The book concentrates itself on Kerala. The terms 'Malabar' and 'Kerala' are used interchangeably in this book. The geographical segment Malabar, mentioned in Portuguese documents, comprises the region beginning with Mount Eli in the north and extending itself to Cape Comorin parcelled out into various kingdoms like Cannanore, Calicut, Cochin, Thekkenkur, Vadakkenkur, Quilon, and Travancore and stretches out on the western coast of India as a distinct strip of land. Though in some of the Portuguese documents the term 'Malabar' is used in the sense of the whole south-western coast of India,³⁸ in the present study it confines itself to the area that is known at present as Kerala.

The period of this study begins with 1498 which marks the arrival of Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese Admiral, and it ends with 1663 in which Cochin, the centre of Portuguese activity in Malabar, was captured by the Dutch who were the rivals of the Portuguese in the Eastern possessions of the Portuguese, especially the *Estado da India*. Such a long period of almost one and a half centuries is taken for this study. To show tangible socio-cultural changes that happened in a society, a study of a longer period is inevitable because as pointed out by Fernand Braudel,³⁹ the socio-cultural changes take place in a long span of time. Therefore it was considered opportune to take this period. Second this period forms one thematic unit of Portuguese influence in Malabar.

The purpose of the study is to shed more light on the society and culture of Malabar during the pre-Portuguese period and also to show the changes that happened in the society and culture of Malabar over a period of one and a half centuries of Portuguese interaction. The study also intends to show how the interaction affected the Malabar society and culture and how far ethnocentrism played a decisive role in the socio-cultural changes in Malabar.

Various primary and secondary sources essential for this work were collected from various archives and libraries in India and abroad. The codex of manuscripts called *Manuscrits Portugais* was consulted at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. *Arquivo Nacional da Torre de Tombo* of Portugal is a great depository of primary sources for this work. The collection of manuscripts named *Corpo Cronológico*, *Colecção de S. Vicente*, *Cartório dos Jesuítas*, *Cartas dos Vice-reis da Índia*, *Chancelaria de D. Manuel*, and *Documentos Remetidos da Índia*, are used for the present work. In addition to that some rare books belonging to *Serie Vermelha* are also consulted. The collections entitled *Reservados*, *Coleccão Pombalina*, *Fundo Geral* and many rare books included in the collection *Reservados* were consulted from the Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, Portugal. The main collection useful for the study of Indian History in *Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino* Lisboa, Portugal is *Caixa da Índia*. From the Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisboa, Portugal, the codices like *Códice 49-IV-49*, *Códice 49-IV-50* and *Códice 51-VII-32* are used for the history of the seventeenth-century Malabar. From British Library, London, the author has made use of the collection called *Additional MS. 9, 853*, which deals with Portuguese British relations and *Additional MS. 26,578* which is related to the history of the *Mapillas* in Malabar. The Codice Nos. like 3025, 3027, 7693, 9529 and *Monções do Reino* from the Historical Archives of Goa, Panjim have been utilized for the study of Indo-Portuguese relations.

Apart from the above libraries and archives, the primary and secondary data was collected from Bibliothèque de Université de Nantes, France; Bibliothèque C.R.H.M.A, Nantes, France; Archive Departmentales de Nantes; Bibliothèque de Centre Culturel Calouste Gulbenkian, Paris; Bibliothèque Asiatique des Missions Etrangères, Paris; Maison de l'Asie Bibliothèque, Paris; Biblioteca da Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal; Biblioteca do Seminário dos Olivais, Lisboa, Portugal; Houston University Library, U.S.A.; Pondicherry University Library, Pondicherry; I.C.H.R. Library, New Delhi; St. Thomas College Library, Palai; St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary Library, Kottayam; and the personal collections of Prof. K.S. Mathew in Pondicherry and Prof. Luis Felipe Thomaz in Lisbon.

Notes

1. The names Malabar and Kerala are interchangeably used in this work. The present State of Kerala in India is depicted in the Portuguese and foreign sources as Malabar during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
2. Nick Mansfield, *Introductory Sociology: Canadian Perspectives*, Toronto, 1982, p. 82.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
4. Frank R. Vivello, *Cultural Anthropology Handbook*, New York, 1978, pp.16-18.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, London, 1971, p. 18.
8. K.S. Mathew, 'Indian Ocean and Cultural Interaction', in *Indica*, vol. 35, no. 2, Bombay, September 1998, p. 101. See also S.C. Dube, *Understanding Change: Anthropological and Sociological Perspectives*, New Delhi, 1992, p. 13.
9. Mansfield, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
10. Howard Becker and Alvin Boskoff (eds.), *Modern Sociological Theory*, New York, 1966, p. 263.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 264
12. *World Book Encyclopaedia*, vol. IV, London, 1992, pp. 490-1.
13. Mansfield, *op. cit.*, p. 373.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 263.
15. M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, California, 1966, p. 7.
16. Yogendra Singh, *Modernization of Indian Tradition: A Systematic Study of Social Change*, New Delhi, 1974, p. 5.
17. M.N. Srinivas, 'A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization', in *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*, London, 1962, p. 55.
18. *World Book Encyclopaedia*, vol. IV, London, 1992, p. 493.
19. Mansfield, *op. cit.*, p. 369.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 369.
22. *World Book Encyclopaedia*, vol. IV, London, 1992, p. 493.
23. The author coins this term to denote the culture that receives foreign culture traits.
24. The author coins the term to denote the culture that penetrates into the host culture.

25. Mansfield, op. cit., p. 370.
26. Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, *História do Descobrimento & Conquista da Índia Pelos Portugueses*, Livro I and II, Coimbra, 1924, p. 7. See also Frederick Charles Danvers, *The Portuguese in India: Being a History of the Rises and Decline of their Eastern Empire*, vol. I, London, 1966, pp. 29-32.
27. Damião Peres, ed., *Diário da Viagem de Vasco da Gama*, Pôrto, 1945, pp. 58-96. See also Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama*, Cambridge, 1977, p. 128.
28. William Brooks Greenlee, *The Voyage of Pedro Alvares Cabral to Brazil and India*, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 72f. See also K.G. Jayne, *Vasco da Gama and His Successors 1460-1580*, New Delhi, 1997.
29. A. Mathias Mundadan, *The St. Thomas Christians of Malabar under Mar Jacob (1498-1552)*, Bangalore, 1967.
30. A. Mathias Mundadan, *Traditions of St. Thomas Christians*, Bangalore, 1970.
31. Jonas Thaliath, T.O.C.D., *The Synod of Diamper*, Bangalore, 1999.
32. Geneviève Bouchon, *Mamale de Cananor: Un adversaire de l'Inde portugaise (1507-1528)*, Paris, 1975.
33. Jacob Kollaparampil, *The St. Thomas Christians' Revolution*, Kottayam, 1981.
34. Joseph Thekkedath, *Troubled Days of Francis Garcia S. J., Archbishop of Cranganore (1641-59)*, Rome, 1972.
35. Joseph Thekkedath, *The History of Christianity in India: From the Middle of the Sixteenth to the End of the Seventeenth Century (1542-1700)*, vol. II, Bangalore, 1988.
36. Pius Malekandathil, 'Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India: 1500-1663' (unpublished thesis submitted to the Pondicherry University for PhD), Pondicherry University, Pondicherry, 1988.
37. K.S. Mathew (ed.), *The Portuguese and the Socio-Cultural Changes in India, 1500-1800*, Tellicherry, 2001.
38. See B.N.L., *Fundo Geral, Reservados, N.º. 3141*. In this document the author Henriques S.J. deals with the grammar of the language of Malabar. Though the document says it deals with the language of Malabar, it actually deals with Tamil. This is an example for the confusion that some of the Portuguese authors had regarding the geographical segment called Malabar.
39. Fernand Braudel, *On History*, translated by Sarah Matthews, Chicago, 1982, pp. 27-52.

CHAPTER II

Portuguese Society and Culture at the Close of the Fifteenth Century

The interaction between the Portuguese and Malabar societies is a unique phenomenon as it was the first interaction between a Western European society and an Eastern society on a lasting basis. A study of this interaction necessitates the study of a short history of Portuguese society and culture without which we will not be able to find the underlying principles of interaction.

The Formation of Independent Portugal

Large tracts of land of Portugal were still under the *Mouros*¹ in the twelfth century. The Portuguese, being Catholics, had a crusading spirit towards the moors or the Muslims. It was the spirit of the time in Christian countries. The Portuguese wanted to liberate the vast tracts of land under the Muslim domination. Affonso Henriques (c.1106-85) of Portugal realized this dream project of the Portuguese. Accordingly, he defeated the Moors near Ourique in 1139. After this victory, he declared himself the King of Portugal. The monarchy established by Affonso Henriques marked the beginning of Portuguese independence.² In 1147, Santarém and Lisbon were recaptured with the help of the French, German and English crusaders. In 1250, the Moors were driven out of Algarve, the last province under their occupation. These conquests and raids

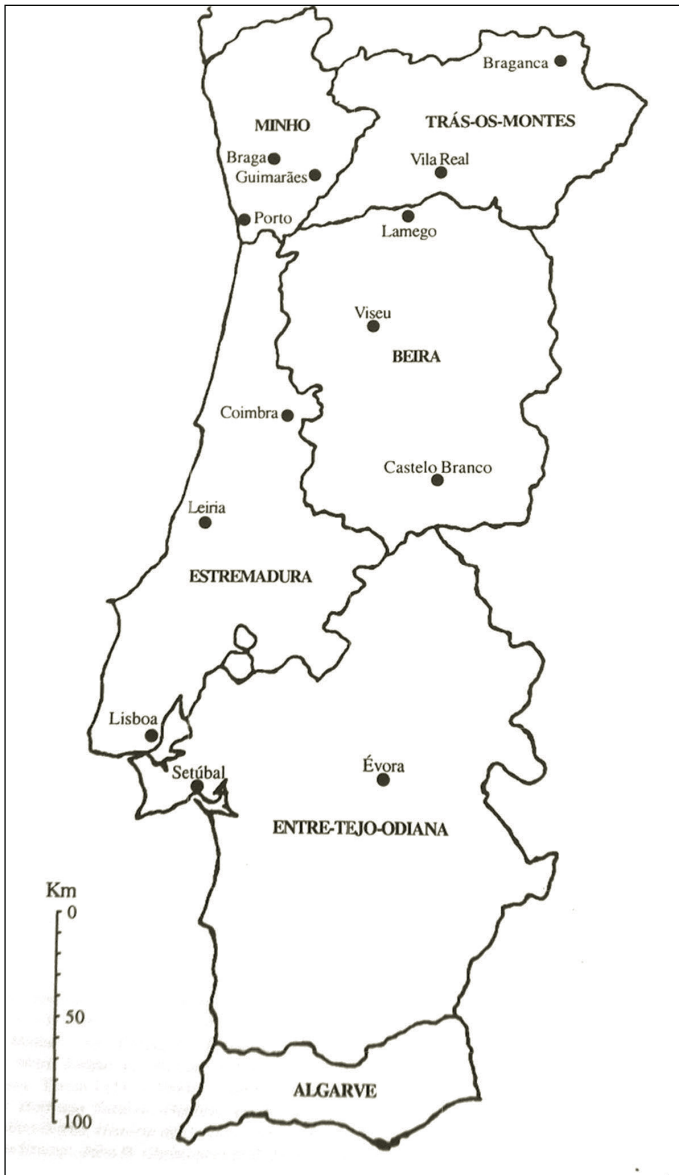


Figure 1: Map of Portugal in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, prepared by the author on the basis of information provided in H.V. Livermore, *A New History of Portugal*, London, 1969, pp. 3, 338.

against the Moors and their success were continued even outside Portugal. In 1340, the combined forces of Portugal and Spain won over the Moorish kingdoms of Granada and Morocco at the Salado River in Spain. Then, their attention turned towards Africa, and C uta was conquered in 1415. The Spanish Granada, which was the stronghold of the Moors in the Iberian Peninsula, was also captured in 1492.³

The Age of Discoveries

The Portuguese attempts to explore the African coast were dominated by three factors. First, Portugal needed slaves for tilling the lands of southern Portugal vacated by the Moors. Second, the Portuguese had a greed for gold, which was said to be in abundance in Africa. And finally, the Portuguese had a craving for pepper and other spices for food, which was becoming a mania in Europe.⁴

Amidst the series of successes in the Iberian Peninsula and Africa, the capture of Constantinople by the Turks was a terrible shock to Christendom.⁵ It had its economic consequences for Europe. The profitable spice trade between the Orient and the Occident fell into the hands of the Turks who pocketed large amounts of profits. The Christian West had to depend upon the Moorish or Turkish merchants heavily for the spices of the East, which were in high demand in Europe. Thus the Muslim middlemen had drained much wealth from Europe.

Against this backdrop, enmity to the Moors, Christening spirit of the Portuguese and the need for a new maritime trade route for trade in spices between the East and the West were the driving force behind the maritime activities of the Portuguese. Thus the series of expeditions and explorations became an affair of national interest.⁶

Pope Alexander VI had assigned to Spain all lands south and west of a North-South line drawn in Atlantic between Azores and the Cape Verde Islands in 1493. The Portuguese got the Eastern hemisphere for their further exploration.⁷ Through the Treaty of Tordesilhas of 1494 between Portugal and Spain, the Portuguese succeeded in getting the line of demarcation, given by the Pope

move 370 leagues to the West.⁸ Thus Brazil fell under the Portuguese sphere.⁹

Against this backdrop, the Portuguese organized the maritime expedition to India, the original source of the much-wanted spices for Europe. Vasco da Gama, a member of an ordinary noble family, was entrusted with the task of leading a fleet to India. The motto of this voyage was 'for Christians and spices'. The geographical knowledge, spread in Europe through various travellers like Marco Polo (1264-1324), had inspired the Christian world. The Europeans had blindly believed that many Asian countries were Christian and the only feasible thing was to bring them under the jurisdiction of the Pope. The legend of Prester John, a great Christian ruler of the East, had also encouraged the Christian world to take up the voyage to the East.¹⁰

Portuguese Society and Culture

The society that had been emerging in Portugal after its conquest and gradual annexation by Affonso Henriques, was mainly an agrarian one. In the north of the river Duro which was densely populated, the land was owned by the king, nobles and the church to one of which the people owed allegiance. The common peasants were not free. There were different forms of slavery and serfdom in those areas. At the same time, in the south there were better opportunities for the peasants. In the southern areas from where the Moors were driven out, much land was lying uncultivated. The virgin land was an attraction for these peasants who flocked to the south where feudal restrictions were not very severe. The settlers were encouraged by the grant of so many privileges. During Affonso Henriques time, large tracts of land were entrusted to the Military Orders for the sake of security and settlement.¹¹

The emergence of King Dinis who was popularly known as the 'farmer king' gave an impetus for added agricultural activities. Farming was the main economic activity. They used to produce grain, wine, flax, hides and bee wax. They were engaged in rearing cattle and sheep also.¹² To meet the challenges of the growing population, new tracts of land were opened for cultivation and

these lands were entrusted either to the military or monastic orders or to the town councils or free settlers. Because of the demand for olive oil and wine from abroad, vineyards and olive groves were extended.¹³

They cultivated vegetable plants, cereals, fruits and wine. Agricultural products were also exported. People engaged in rearing cattle and sheep and also in fishing.¹⁴ The kings always encouraged the people to cultivate land and produce more. Vineyards and olive groves were given special attention.¹⁵ The people also worked in flour mills and water mills, which were owned by the nobility.¹⁶

Many people earned their livelihood through fishing. It continued as one of the bases of the economy of Portugal during the fifteenth century. Fish was exported and fishing continued to be an important occupation of the inhabitants of Viana do Castelo, Ponte de Lima and Vila do Conde where people depended on the exportation of fish.¹⁷ It was fishing that bred generations of seamen and crew for the later maritime explorations of Portugal.

The main industries of this period were textile and leather. During this period there developed weaving for artistic as well as commercial purposes. Flax was cultivated for linen in different parts of the country.¹⁸ The people also explored new iron mines. From the iron so obtained they made nails, horseshoes and other iron implements. In addition, silver, lead and precious stones were also explored. Salt was either mined or panned. Besides, there was the ship-making industry.¹⁹ These ships were mainly used for fishing purpose. But later on armed ships and ships for international traffic were also constructed. For the ships, lateen sails, anchors, cables, ropes, wood, planks, iron and so on were used.²⁰ During the fifteenth century, soap-making became very popular. It was extended to the whole of the country. At the time of Prince Henrique, it was to be produced only with the license.²¹ During the fourteenth century there was an increase in the number of industries. One of the main reasons for this increase was the coming of artisans from other countries. Thus there developed the metallic industry, making of arms, glass and so on.²²

There developed internal trade and external trade in Portugal. Internal trade was conducted in fairs and also through wandering

merchants. In medieval Portuguese society there were fairs which were held especially during feasts of the church. The first ever-documented fair in Portugal was in the year 1229 held in Castelo Mendo thrice a year. During the successive periods the number of fairs increased and were extended. It was an occasion for buying and selling commodities for day-to-day life. The kings used to issue orders in such a way to protect the fairs.²³ The main commodities dealt with in these fairs were wine, wheat, barley, rye, nuts, chestnuts, pigeons, hens, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, cows, horses, mules, donkeys, linseed, iron and so on.²⁴ Between 1250 and 1300 some thirty official markets were established. To encourage trade, the merchants visiting such official markets were exempted from paying taxes. Agricultural products like wine, olive oil and honey were taken to these markets. Foreign trade developed through the mouth of Duro, Mondego and Tagus. Commodities like oil, honey, wine, fruits, fish and cork were exported to France, Flanders, England, West Mediterranean and the Baltic countries. This gave an added impetus to the middle-class traders and cultivators. When the volume of trade increased, an urban middle class also developed along with it. The Jews, who were there in abundance, participated in this fortune-seeking endeavour and acted as middlemen between the Christians and the Moors.²⁵ By the end of the fifteenth century, Portugal was capable of exporting commodities she gained from her overseas possessions such as sugar, wood, vegetable colours, and spices from the coast of Africa. The main imports to Portugal included cereals, manufactured cloth, weapons for war, and metallic objects. By this time the Port of Lisbon was in a position to receive large commercial ships coming from different countries.²⁶ The main areas from where imports were made were England, France, Flanders and Ireland.²⁷ Through the trade with different countries of Western Europe, the Portuguese understood the worth of maritime trade and its relevance for the country's economy. It was because of this that even 'Maritime Exchange' was introduced in Portugal as one of the earliest insurance organization in Europe.²⁸ Together with it, towns also began to develop with a large number of traders and craftsmen. By the fourteenth century, the merchants of Porto and Lisbon became so influential that they were able to

sign treaties with Edward III, the king of England. Capital began to be accumulated in Portugal through trade and shipping.²⁹ Because of the market-oriented production of commercial crops, food shortage occurred in Portugal.³⁰ However, trade was very prosperous during the fourteenth century.³¹

As was common in Western Europe – the society in Portugal was divided into three estates – the clergy, nobility and the commoners.

Portuguese Clergy

The church was well established. Under each diocese, there were many parishes, which were run by the ‘secular clergy’. The regular clergy was living in various monasteries and convents under different orders. On certain occasions, even the members of the military orders as well as the third orders were considered as members of the clergy.³²

There were a lot of clergy in Portugal during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It was a privileged estate. The church had a proper organization and hierarchical structure. The Pope was the Supreme Pontiff and head of the Catholic Church. Though he resided outside the country, he had a lot of control over the catholic kings of Europe as even kings were subject to the authority of the Pope. The civil laws had nothing to do with the clergy and other ecclesiastical officers as they were subject to the Canon Law. This made their position more secure. On the other hand, the society was subservient to the clergy because of their specific spiritual functions. Thus, the church was like a separate state within the state.³³ There were times when the Pope became more powerful than the king. For example, the Pope succeeded in deposing King Sancho II in 1245.³⁴ It shows how powerful the church and the clergy were. The clergy was represented in the courts by bishops, abbots, priors and temporally by the masters of the military orders. The clergy could be judged only in an ecclesiastical court.³⁵

The clergy had a lot of economic benefits. The people made generous offerings to the clergy, especially at the time of the administration of different Sacraments. They were also given offerings for the celebration of divine cult. People, in addition to the tithes,