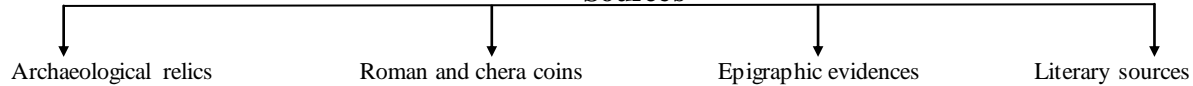


Theme 14. Pre-Modern Kerala: Economy, Society and Polity

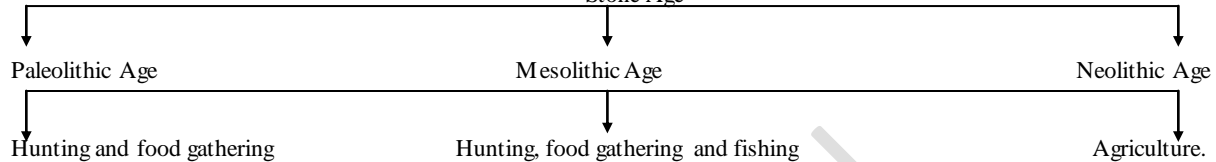
Sources



Beginning of human life in Kerala

- Kerala is a narrow strip of land lying between Arabian Sea in the west and Western Ghats in the east.
- Geographically, Kerala has been divided into three parts-highland, middle land and coastal plains.
- The beginning of human life in the geographical area can be traced back to the Stone Age.

Stone Age



The earliest people lived in the rockshelters. Pre-historic artistic creations have been found at

- * Marayaur (Idukki)
- * Edakkal and Toveri (Wayanad)
- * Ankode (Thiruvananthapuram)
- * Tenmala (Kollam)

Early historic Phase or Iron Age (300 BCE to 500 CE)

The earliest known phase of Kerala is the **Megalithic phase** or **Iron Age** and the **early historic period**.

Sources

- * Burial monuments like rock cut chambers, kudakkals, toppikkals, dolmens, cists, burial urns, sarcophagus, menhirs etc.
- * Burial goods such as potteries, iron objects stone beads and bone fragments.
- * Sangam Literature
- * The early Tamil Brahmi inscriptions
- * Greco-Roman classical accounts
- * Punch marked and Roman coins.

Megaliths

- * Megalith means big stone.
- * Burial monuments are known as Megaliths.
- * All burial monuments are not megaliths. For example urn and sarcophagus made of clay
- * Scholars differ regarding the chronology of the megaliths of Kerala.
- * The period of megaliths is in between 300 BCE and 500 CE. This period is generally considered as the Iron Age and Early historic period in Kerala.
- * During this period, Kerala was a part of Tamizhakam extended from Venkatam in the north to Kanyakumari in the south

Multiple subsistence

- * The people during this period practiced multiple subsistence form such as hunting, food gathering, cattle rearing, plunder, slash and burn cultivation, wetland cultivation, pottery making, metal smelting, fishing, salt making

The Sangam period in Kerala history

This period can be dated from the beginning of the Common Era to the middle of the 7th century.

Tinai Concept (Aintinai (Five Tinai))

- The anthologies of ancient Tamil poetry popularly referred to as Sangam literature mentions five Tinai or eco zones. According to it, Tamizhakam was divided into five zones

Tinai	Eco zone	Occupation	Inhabitants
Kurinci	Hilly forest region	Hunting and food gathering	Kuravar, Kanavar, Vatar
Mullai	Pastoral region	Cattle rearing	Idayar, Ayar
Palai	Dry land	Plunder	Maravar, Kalavar
Marutham	Wet plains	Agriculture	Uzhavar, Thozhuvar
Neital	Coastal area	Fishing and salt making	Paratar, Meenavar

Social order (Sangam period)

- The Sangam society was divided on the basis of eco-zones (Tinai) and occupation.
- The Sangam period witnessed the emergence of specialized craft groups.
- Sangam works mentioned different occupational groups.
- Kuti was the kin based occupational group. They were called as Kutimakkal.
- Ur was the basic kin based settlement unit. It consisted of a number of kutis.
- Nadu was the wider resourceful settlement area.
- The megaliths and burial goods indicate that people believed in life after death.
- They had separate space for the disposal of dead near their settlement area.
- Manimekhalai refers to different forms of burial practices such as body cremation, exposure, pit burial etc.

Exchange during the Sangam period

- There were three kinds of exchanges: local, long distance and overseas.
- Local trade**
 - The chieftains redistributed the paddy among various tribal groups.
 - The goods of each Tinai were exchanged with those of other regions.
 - The local exchange centres were known as Cantai, Angadi etc.
- Long distance trade**
 - Fish and salt from coastal area were frequently moved to the long distance places.
 - The Umanar (salt merchants) were the professional specialists in long distance trade.
 - They were accompanied by a group of warriors called Maravar for giving protection.
 - Tamil Brahmi inscription refers to specialist merchants such as Ponvanikan (gold merchant), Aruvai Vanikan (textile merchant) Kozhuvanikan (plough merchant), Uppuvanikan (salt merchant) and Panithavanikan (toddy merchant).
 - The discovery of punch marked coins (kottayam and Eyyal) and semi-precious stones (Pattanam) give information about the trade between north India and South India.
- Overseas trade**
 - Periplus of Erythrean Sea of an anonymous author refers to the port cities of Kerala coast like Naura, Tyndis, Muziris, Becare, Nelcynda, and Belita etc.
 - Traders from Mediterranean region particularly Greeks and Romans frequently visited Kerala coast for collecting the spices.
 - Muziris (present kodungalloor) was one of the important coastal port towns during the period.
 - Recent pattanam excavation furnished a large amount of archaeological remains of the Indo-Roman and west Asian trade.
 - The Roman gold coins discovered from Valluvaly (Eranakulam dist.), Eyyal (Thrissur dist.) and kottayam poil (Kannur dist.) also provide instances of Roman trade with Kerala coast.

Formation of early chieftdom

- The redistribution process led to the development of chieftdom in the Sangam society.
- The tribal chiefs redistributed the plundered items among the members of the tribe.
- The Sangam poems mention about three layers of chieftains in the early period such as Kizhar, Velir and Ventar.
- Kizhars** were the hunter chiefs in the Ur known as Ur-kizhar or Ur-mannar.
- Velir** were the hill chieftains who controlled the kurinji and Mullai regions.
- Ventar** represented the three major chiefly lineages of early Tamizhakam-Chera, Pandya and Chola (Muventar or Muvar).
- During the period, Tamizhakam was under the control of two Velir chiefs-the Nannan of Ezhimala in the north and Ays in the South and the Ventar Chera in the middle.
- The patittupattu and Purananuru mention chera lineages.
- The core area of the chera chief was Karur. Muciri was important centre of Cheras.

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Post –Sangam Period in Kerala history

Features of the Post Sangam period

1. Consolidation of agrarian settlements

- The post Sangam period witnessed the continuation of the multiple subsistence forms.
- Expansion of cultivation in the wet land (Nilam,Vayal etc.),Garden lands(parambu) and house sites(purayidams)
- Formation of multi-crop agriculture settlements
- Expansion of Brahmin settlements-Brahmins received lands from the local chiefs cultivated by tenants.
- Expansion of structural temples-Temple inscriptions gives details of land grants by the local chieftains to temples. (Trikkakara inscription)
- The Brahmins and temples established superior land rights over the agrarian settlements of the peasants.

2. Formation of a stratified society

- Formation of two classes in the society: the land holders and the landless cultivators.
- Emergence of intermediate lease holding groups called Karalar
- Emergence of forced labour(Adiyayma) 'Al' means slave
- Emergence of various occupational groups-Tachar(carpenters),Kalavaniyar(potters),Vaniyar(oil mongers), Vannar(washer men) etc.
- Emergence of Temple functionaries.
- Redistribution of surplus production and incomes among temple functionaries as rewards for their service.(Viruti or Jivitam)
- Growth of the Bhakti movement of the Alvar (Vaishnavate) and Nayanar(Shaivate)
- Social stratification was based on the Brahmanical notions of caste hierarchy

3. Formation of Multi-cultural settlements

- Buddhism and Jainism influenced early society of Kerala.
- The Buddhist images were found at Karumadi,Mavelikkara,Bharanikkavu,Pallikkal and Marudukulangara, Srimoolavasam (Buddhist vihara)
- The cult of Sastha(Ayyappa) emphasizes the Buddhist influence.
- The first chera ruler Utiyan Cheralatan practiced Vadakkirikkal (death by starvation according to jain tradition)
- Trikkanamatilakam near Kodungallur was a centre of Jain influence.
- St.Thomas tradition and Syrian Christian copper plate of 849 CE show the formation of Christian settlements in Kerala.
- The mosque inscription from panthalayani Kollam, Muchunti (Calicut)Madayi(Kannur) and the Cheraman mosque at Kodungallur prove the spread of Islam in Kerala.
- The cultural contacts through trade created social cohesion among different creeds which led to the formation of a multi-cultural society.

Perumals of Mahodayapuram (800 CE-1122 CE)

- The Perumal kingdom was the first monarchical power of Kerala.
- Makotai or Mahodayapuram (present day Kodungalloor) was the capital of the perumal.
- They are called as the later Cheras and their kingdom as second Chera kingdom. (9th century).
- The King bears royal titles such as Rajasekhara, Kulasekhara, perumal and cheraman.
- The king had a council known as Nalu Tali.It consisted of the managers of four temple committees.
- The four Talis were Meltali,Kizhtali,Nediyathali and Chingapuram Tali.
- The royal representative was called Koyil Adhikarikal.
- The king had a militia called Ayiram (ten thousand).

Nadu and Nattudayavar

- During this time, Nadus developed as a political unit. Perumal was the overlord of the nadus.
- Each nadu was under the control of a chief known as Nattudayavar or Nadu Valumavar.
- They controlled the land called Cherikkal.They maintained their own warrior groups called Nurruvar (hundreds such as Munnuttuvar and Arunnuravar.
- Below the nadus, there were number of semi-autonomous local bodies such as Nakara and Ur or Grama.
- Ur was the basic agrarian unit consisting of cultivators and other occupational groups. The assemblies of the Brahmins were also known as Ur.
- Trade guilds constituted the Nagara.They managed the administration of the Nakara.
- They were exempted from taxes and dues and enjoyed many privileges.
- The most important merchant guild were Anchuvannam,Manigramam and Valanchiyar.

Kaccam

Legal code of the perumal period was called Kaccam. The major Kaccam was Mulikkalam Kaccam. It includes several punishments such as excommunication, expulsion from positions, confiscation of property and social and political ostracism.

Taxes and dues

The Perumal received annual dues called Attaikkol and Arantai from Brahmin Settlement. They also received protection tax called Rakshabhoga from villages or temples.

The post-Perumal period

Major changes during the period between 12th and 18th Centuries

Agricultural production

- Multi-crop production continued
- Wetland paddy cultivation continued.
- Cultivation was extended to upland slopes and terraces, valley of the hillocks.
- Paddy was also imported from outside Kerala.
- Sugarcane, Plantains etc. were cultivated
- Pepper, Cardamom and ginger were the major cash crop cultivated in gardens.
- Coconut was an important item of trade
- Arecanut were planted and timbers were collected from forests.

Local Trade

- Kerala had trade contacts with north through land and Sea.
- Trade guilds of the early medieval period continued their trade
- Tamil Brahmins actively participated in the trade between Kerala and Tamilnadu.
- Horse was an important item of trade.
- Brisk trade connection was established between Arabs and Kerala.
- Goods such as rice, millets, vegetables, coconut, plantains, salt, and fish etc. were exchanged locally.
- There were daily markets and village markets.
- Ayanarcira was a local centre for exchange in the Valluvanad region. Barter was the most common form of exchange

Long distance trade

- Spices from Kerala were exported to China and brought silks, ceramics, mercury, tin etc in return.
- Kerala became a transit point between China and Western countries.
- The Chinese traveller's accounts describe the port cities like Kollam, Kochi, and Kozhikode etc.
- The traveller's accounts also refers to the presence of Chinese ships, ceramics, coins, merchants and other trading groups like Jews and Muslims.

Swarupams

- The post perumal period saw the growth of Naduvazhi swarupams.- Kolathunadu, Kozhikode, Kochi, Venadu.
- Swarupam was the autonomous region controlled by the powerful matrilineal joint families.
- Their political authority was based on Kuru or Tavazhi.
- The eldest member of the matrilineal lineage became head of swarupam (kuruvazhcha or moopumura)
- There quarrels between the Tavazhis over the question of seniority (muppumura).
- Swarupam maintained army called Ayirathvar, pathinayirathavar, Patamala nair etc.
- Ariyittuvazhcha and Hiranyagarbha (coronation ceremonies), Abhishekanama (coronation titles) were important features of swarupam.

Sanketam

- Sanketam was a quasi-autonomous territory consisting of several villages organized around a brahmanical temple.
- There were two kinds of Sanketam
- 1. One was instituted by land holder.
- 2. Other was established by rulers.
- Many Sanketams were managed by an assembly of Brahmins called Yogam

Land holding rights

- The early medieval land holding right continued in the post perumal period. (Land holding rights over the Brahmasvam, Devasvam and cherikkal lands).
- New land holding rights such as Janmam, Verumpatam, Kanam, Kuzhikkanam etc. also emerged.
- Janmam: hereditary rights over the land
- Verumpattam: simple leases. Tenant cultivators were the lease holders.
- Kanam: land holding right obtained through mortgage.
- Kuzhikkanam: Landholding rights over garden land.
- The landowner-tenant relation was based on the traditional customs and practices called Maryadai, Kizhmaryadai, Kizhizhakkam etc.

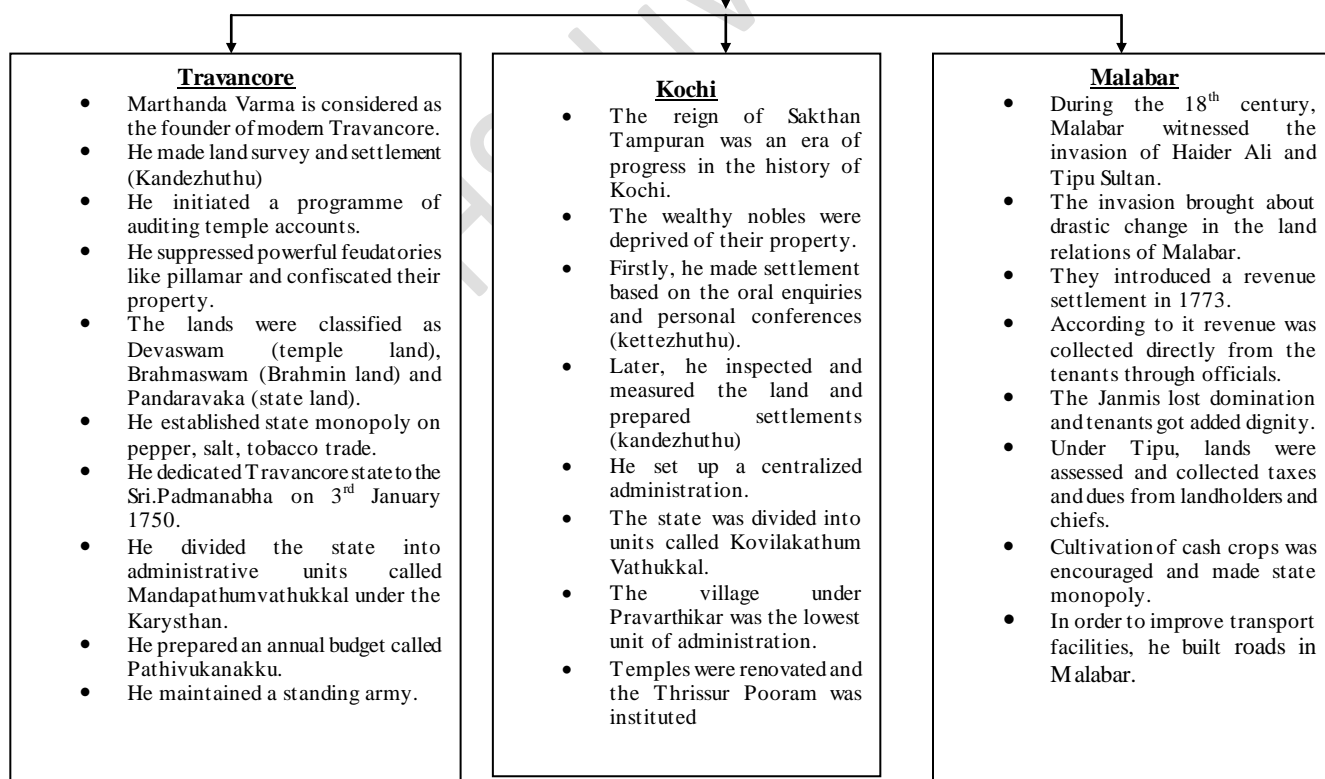
Agrarian relations

- At the top of the caste hierarchy was the landlords
- Below them were tenants (kudiyar)
- At the bottom of the caste hierarchy was actual labourer (Adiyar or Aladiyar)
- The relation between these classes was regulated by the rigid caste rules.
- The lower classes were regarded as polluted (Asudham) Caste groups.
- Various officials such as Menon, Karyakkar, pillamar, Madampis, Sarvadhikaryakkar were associated with the landlords.
- Warrior groups like Nayars, Kurup, and Nambiar etc. were also enjoyed higher status in the caste hierarchy.
- Some of the Izhavas were landholders but had no right over the land. They had to provide a share of produce known as melvaram, melodi, pattam etc. to the landlord.
- Occupational groups such as carpenters, masons, goldsmiths and other metal workers were enjoyed a higher status than Adiyar.
- Christians and Muslims acted as traders and involved in agriculture too.

Advent of Europeans

- Portuguese was the first European power who came to Kerala.
- Vasco da Gama reached at Kappad near Calicut in 1498.
- The Portuguese ended the Arab supremacy in Malabar trade.
- They established trade monopoly in east India.
- The Dutch also reached at Kozhikode in 1604.
- They obtained trade monopoly by defeating the Portuguese.
- They established a settlement at Colachel in Kanyakumari.
- Marthanda Varma, the Travancore ruler defeated the Dutch in the battle of Colachel in 1741.
- The English under Captain Keeling came to Kerala.
- They established factories at Vizhinjam, Attingal, Anjengo and Tellichery.
- The French also obtained permission for trade at Mahe.
- Kerala became a battlefield between different European powers for commercial domination.

Kerala during the 18th century



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British colonial power

- Malabar came under the British rule in 1792(Srirangapattanam treaty)
- The British took over the rights of the chiefs of Malabar.
- They were given Malikhans or pensions.
- The British reversed the revenue system and treated Janmi as the land owner.
- The tenants became tenant cultivator.
- Joint Commissioners were appointed for the collection of revenue.
- Travancore and Kochi remained princely states with limited autonomy
- A British Resident was appointed for these states.
- Colonel John Munro was the first British Resident for Travancore and Kochi.

References

Mushakavamsakavya: The earliest historical chronicle of Kerala. It was written by Atula, the court poet of Srikanta, Mushaka ruler of Ezhimala in Kannur district.

Pattanam Excavation: Pattanam is the first site on the Kerala coast to yield a variety of archaeological evidence especially on the Indo-Roman and West Asian trade. The Kerala Council for Historical Research (KCHR) has conducted excavations here.

Alvars and Nayanars: The two streams of south Indian Bhakti movement. The Vaishnava saints were known as Alvars and the Saiva saints as Nayanars. Kulasekhara Alvar, the author of Perumal Tirumozhi and Cheraman Perumal Nayanar were the two important Bhakti leaders.

Merchant corporations: Anchuvannam, Manigramam, Valanchiyar and Nanadesi were the trade guilds in Kerala. Manigramam was associated with Mar Sapi Iso. Anchuvannam was associated with the Jewish merchant Joseph Rubban.

Tiruvallanculi Inscription: The last ruler of the second Chera kingdom was Rama Kulasekhara. The inscription found near Tanjore in the Chola country dated in the 4th year of Vikrama Chola (1122 CE) refers Rama Kulasekhara.

Granthavari: A collection of documents over the transaction of temples and royal households. For example Matilakam Granthavari of Padmanabha swami temple of Travancore.

Cartz: Pass issued by the Portuguese officials to prevent other ships from conducting trade with any part of India.

Kunjali Marakkars: Admirals of the fleet of Zamorin of Calicut who fought against the Portuguese.

Attingal Revolt: The earliest organized popular resistance against British power in Kerala.

Battle of Colachel: Battle between Marthanda Varma and Dutch at Colachel on 10th August 1741.

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