
THE PORTUGUESE IN MALABAR: TRADE NETWORKS AND POLITICAL INTERVENTION IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

HARI GOVIND

RESEARCH SCHOLAR, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, ANNAMALAI UNIVERSITY, CHIDAMBARAM, TAMIL NADU, INDIA, EMAIL : hgovind88@gmail.com ,

DR. P. JEYABALAKRISHNAN

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, T.K.GOV.T. ARTS COLLEGE, VRIDDHACHALAM

Abstract

This article examines the commercial expansion and political interventions of the Portuguese on the Malabar Coast during the sixteenth century, with particular reference to the voyages of Vasco da Gama and the subsequent establishment of Portuguese maritime dominance in the Indian Ocean. As the first European power to engage directly in the spice trade through an all-sea route, the Portuguese fundamentally altered existing trading networks and political relationships in the region. Beyond commerce, they actively intervened in local politics, forging alliances with select principalities while exacerbating rivalries among indigenous powers. The introduction of coercion and maritime violence marked a decisive departure from earlier patterns of Indian Ocean trade. This study analyses the nature of Portuguese trade, the mechanisms of control they employed, and the political consequences of their presence on the Malabar Coast.

Keywords: Zamorin, Marakkar, Mappila, Pardesi, Quilon

INTRODUCTION

From the Portuguese discovery of the Cape sea route at the close of the fifteenth century until their commercial dominance was challenged by the Dutch in the seventeenth century, the Portuguese remained the only European power engaged in direct maritime trade between Europe and Asia through an all sea route. The significance of this discovery lay in its disruption of the long standing monopoly exercised by Venetian and Egyptian intermediaries over trade with India. The arrival of the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama on the Malabar Coast marked the end of India's relative political isolation from Europe, although earlier contacts had been largely confined to regions along the north western frontier. The establishment of a direct sea route to India brought about a fundamental transformation in the direction, organization, and control of the ancient transoceanic trade linking the Mediterranean world with the Indian Ocean. Spices that had previously been transported from Cochin and Calicut to Alexandria and Beirut for redistribution by Venetian merchants were henceforth monopolized by the Portuguese Crown, with Lisbon emerging as the principal centre of European Asian trade. This development also signaled a decisive break from the largely peaceful traditions of Indian Ocean commerce, as the Portuguese introduced systematic coercion and violence into maritime trade networks that had functioned for centuries with minimal conflict.

Vasco da Gama's voyage and his landing on the Malabar Coast at Kappad, near Calicut, on 18 May 1498, after overcoming considerable hardships and dangers, inaugurated a new phase in the history of Malabar. His fleet, consisting of four vessels, Sao Gabriel, Sao Rafael, a caravel, and a store ship, followed the African coastline, touching at Angola, Mozambique, Mombasa, and Malindi. At Mozambique, the fleet benefited from the accumulated navigational knowledge of Asian seafarers, which enabled its onward journey to India. The Sultan of Malindi, perceiving the Portuguese as potential allies against the hostile city of Mombasa, extended a cordial reception and provided Gama with the services of a Konkani pilot to guide the fleet across the Indian Ocean to Malabar. Although the first land sighted on the Malabar Coast was Cannanore, the Portuguese continued southward and eventually anchored off Kappad, a few miles north of Calicut.

Vasco da Gama at Calicut

Upon Vasco da Gama's arrival at Kappad, he was received by the Zamorin and his subjects in accordance with established traditions of hospitality. Although the ruler exchanged customary greetings and held discussions with the Portuguese delegation, the encounter failed to produce any concrete outcome. Gama's failure as a diplomat can be attributed to several factors that collectively undermined the negotiations. First, he did not present valuable gifts of the kind expected according to local custom. Second, he demanded that the Zamorin supply one bahar of cinnamon, another of cloves, and other spices in exchange for the goods brought from Portugal, which remained unsold due to the absence of demand for those commodities in Calicut. Third, Gama sought permission to leave behind a factor to manage the unsold merchandise, but the Zamorin insisted on the payment of customs duties in

accordance with local law. Finally, Gama urged the expulsion of the Moorish merchants from Calicut, despite the fact that they had long dominated the region's trade.

Shortly after departing from Calicut, Gama proceeded to Cannanore, where he was received by Kolathiri, the ruler of the region, who was engaged in ongoing rivalry with the Zamorin. A treaty of friendship was concluded between the two parties, and the ruler of Cannanore supplied Gama with the commodities he required. Gama then set sail for Europe on 20 November 1498 and reached Lisbon by the end of 1499. The cargo he carried was estimated to be worth several times the cost of the expedition. Following Gama's return, the king of Portugal assumed the title Lord of the Conquest, Navigation, and Commerce of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia, and India.

Early Portuguese Maritime Expeditions after 1498

Following Vasco da Gama's initial expedition, several further Portuguese voyages were organized to consolidate their presence in the Indian Ocean. Encouraged by the results of the first voyage, the Portuguese Crown appointed Pedro Álvares Cabral to command the next expedition. A fleet comprising thirty three ships and approximately fifteen hundred men departed from Lisbon on 9 March 1500. After a hazardous journey, Cabral reached the Malabar Coast and anchored off Calicut on 13 September with only six surviving vessels. During the voyage, the fleet was diverted by a storm toward the South American coast, leading to Cabral's accidental discovery of Brazil. At Calicut, Cabral's agent Aires Correa negotiated an agreement with the Zamorin, granting the Portuguese permission to establish a factory in the city. However, intense commercial rivalry between the Portuguese and Arab merchants in the Indian Ocean soon strained relations between Calicut and the Portuguese. In 1501, a fleet commanded by João da Nova was dispatched, but upon learning of the difficulties faced by Cabral at Calicut during a stop at Mozambique, it abandoned its course to Malabar and returned to Portugal.

Cabral's experience persuaded King Dom Manuel of the necessity of dispatching a stronger and more heavily armed fleet to India if his imperial claims were to be sustained. Motivated by the anticipated profits of the spice trade, the desire to propagate the Catholic faith, and the need to secure Portugal's Indian connections, a large squadron of twenty ships was sent to India on 3 March 1502 under the command of Vasco da Gama, marking his second voyage to the region. This expedition also reflected the Crown's dissatisfaction with the limited success of Cabral's mission.

Vasco da Gama undertook his third voyage to India in 1524, accompanied by thirteen vessels carrying nearly three thousand troops. Upon his arrival at Cochin, he found Portuguese possessions threatened by the forces of the Zamorin. His tenure in India, however, was brief. On the night of 25 December 1524, Vasco da Gama died, having spent only three months in the region.

The Militarization of Trade on the Malabar Coast

The political rivalries among the rajas of Malabar and the expansionist ambitions of the Zamorin of Calicut, particularly his efforts to extend authority southward through repeated attacks on Cochin in order to assert supremacy over Malabar, created a political environment that the Portuguese were able to exploit effectively. The Portuguese introduced the systematic use of violence into the Indian Ocean trading world in general and the Malabar Coast in particular. During the fifteenth century, the Indian Ocean maritime trading network connected ports extending from Quanzhou in southern China to Sofala on the southeastern coast of Africa. Major entrepot centres such as Malacca, Calicut, Cambay, Ormuz, Aden, and Kilwa occupied prominent positions within this network, yet no single power exercised exclusive control over maritime trade.

Portuguese intervention fundamentally altered this commercial equilibrium. Their repeated attacks on Calicut prompted many Muslim merchants to abandon the port, despite the protection offered by the Zamorin. This departure of established mercantile communities contributed significantly to the decline of what had once been a thriving centre of Indian Ocean trade.

The earliest Portuguese voyages to Malabar in 1498, 1500, and 1502 were marked by a series of violent encounters previously unknown in the region. These conflicts were driven by several core Portuguese demands. First, the Portuguese insisted that the rulers of Calicut, Cannanore, and Quilon expel indigenous trading communities, many of whom were of Arab origin and served as intermediaries between local producers and foreign merchants. When these demands were articulated through both diplomatic pressure and military action, the Zamorin questioned how it would be possible to expel more than four thousand Muslim householders who were long established in Calicut and from whom the kingdom derived considerable revenue. Given these fundamentally incompatible objectives, compromise was unlikely.

Second, the Portuguese attempt to monopolize the spice trade required the delivery of the entire pepper output of Malabar, a demand that exceeded the authority of local rulers and chieftains. Third, the introduction of the cartaz system, which aimed to regulate maritime trade through compulsory passes, ran counter to established Indian Ocean trading practices, despite the existence of customs duties at most ports. From 1504 onwards, Portuguese officials demanded that Moorish vessels obtain passes from their commandants at Cochin and Cannanore.

To enforce their commercial ambitions, the Portuguese employed extensive violence. During his first visit, Vasco da Gama expected immediate compliance with his demands for spices and reacted with extreme anger when the Zamorin refused. When the king detained a Portuguese factor and his clerk as security for payment, Gama seized six Nairs and sixteen fishermen who had boarded his ships. During Cabral's stay at Calicut, Portuguese forces captured multiple Moorish vessels, transferred their cargoes to the factory, and carried out large scale violence in which many merchants were killed. The city was bombarded, ships were burned, and severe destruction was inflicted on the port. During his second voyage in 1502, Gama intercepted a vessel returning from Mecca with

approximately three hundred pilgrims on board, confiscated its merchandise, and burned the ship despite appeals for mercy. He further intensified the brutality by sending mutilated body parts of the victims as a message to the Zamorin. Similar acts of aggression occurred when Almeida's fleet was stationed at Cochin, where Portuguese commanders seized Muslim vessels loaded with pepper. Plunder, seizure of ships, massacre, and bombardment thus became integral instruments of the Portuguese attempt to establish a monopoly over the Malabar spice trade. Portuguese control of the seas, however, was not firmly established until the conflict at Chaul. In November 1508, a combined force consisting of Mir Husayn of Egypt, the Zamorin of Calicut, and Malik Ayaz of Diu confronted the Portuguese fleet. Francisco de Almeida arrived at Chaul with a large European force supported by Cochin Nairs, while the opposing side was reinforced by an Egyptian fleet under Mir Husayn. After two days of intense fighting, the Portuguese suffered defeat and temporarily lost control of the sea. In response, the viceroy personally assumed command of the fleet and sailed to Diu in December 1508 with European troops and Cochin allies in order to avenge his son's death and restore maritime supremacy. The decisive naval engagement of February 1509 resulted in the defeat of the allied forces opposing the Portuguese, leading to the establishment of Portuguese command over the Indian Ocean.

Consolidation of Portuguese Power on the Malabar Coast

Following Vasco da Gama's successful voyage, King Dom Manuel of Portugal assumed the title of Lord of the Conquest, Navigation, and Commerce of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia, and India. This marked the beginning of sustained Portuguese intervention along the Indian Ocean littoral. The Portuguese depredations at Calicut and their subsequent alliance with Cochin caused considerable anxiety for the Zamorin. Relations between Calicut and Cochin deteriorated rapidly, as the Zamorin repeatedly warned the Raja of Cochin against cooperating with the Portuguese and demanded the expulsion of all Portuguese subjects from his kingdom. The Raja of Cochin refused, leading to a series of prolonged conflicts between Calicut and Cochin that resulted in significant loss of life and resources.

The Zamorin's repeated attacks on Cochin provided the Portuguese with justification to strengthen their military presence in the region. In 1503, they constructed their first fort at Cochin, the earliest European fort on Indian soil. During Almeida's expedition, the Portuguese secured permission to build a fortress at Cannanore in 1505, continuing the diplomatic ties established earlier by Vasco da Gama with the Kolathiri ruler. It is reported that the Kolathiri appointed Nair guards to protect the area. When Albuquerque arrived at Cochin, he found the original fort severely damaged by Zamorin attacks. He supervised its reconstruction and expansion, which was completed and further strengthened by 1515.

A Portuguese fort was also constructed at Calicut in 1513 following the death of the reigning Zamorin. However, the succeeding ruler adopted a hostile stance towards the Portuguese. After a Portuguese attack on Ponnani, the southern capital of the Zamorin's kingdom, in 1525, the Portuguese fort at Calicut was besieged and eventually evacuated and destroyed. Portuguese commercial expansion continued elsewhere, and trade relations were established with Quilon, where a factory was constructed in 1519 despite internal opposition from the junior Rani. This was achieved through political negotiation and inducements. In subsequent years, the Portuguese entered into additional treaties with minor principalities, offering military protection in exchange for trading privileges and permission to establish forts and factories.

Once these fortified establishments were secured, the Portuguese used them as bases for enforcing their commercial policies. As part of their eastern strategy, they restricted the export of key commodities such as pepper and ginger and seized vessels that violated their regulations. To strengthen control over maritime routes, the Portuguese constructed auxiliary forts at Pallipuram and Vaipin north of Cochin to dominate traffic along the Periyar River and to defend Cochin against land based attacks from Calicut.

Portuguese efforts to monopolize trade depended heavily on cooperation with local rulers. Consequently, numerous treaties were concluded to ensure steady supplies of spices and mutual military support. In 1516, under Lopo Soares, an agreement with Quilon stipulated the annual supply of a fixed quantity of pepper in instalments and mutual assistance in times of conflict. Earlier, in 1513, the Zamorin had agreed to supply one thousand bahars of pepper as compensation for damages incurred during Cabral's visit. A further treaty was signed with the Zamorin at Ponnani in 1540, under which the Portuguese agreed to purchase Calicut pepper at Cochin rates, regulate ginger prices, permit limited private exports by the Zamorin, sell portions of their merchandise at Calicut to ensure customary dues, and supply specific commodities such as quicksilver.

Commercial Intermediaries and the Organization of Portuguese Trade on the Malabar Coast

Intermediaries, particularly local merchant communities, played a crucial role in the organization and functioning of Portuguese trade on the Malabar Coast. Among these, the Marakkar traders originating from the rice ports of Kunimedu, Kilkarai, and Kayalpatanam on the Coromandel Coast were especially significant. By supplying food grains and other provisions to Malabar ports in exchange for spices, these merchants formed a major mercantile network that effectively linked the economies of the Coromandel Coast and Malabar during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Portuguese officials at Cochin established close commercial relations with prominent local merchants such as Cherianina Marakkar and Mamale Marakkar, who were entrusted with storing pepper for the Portuguese fleet that arrived under Lopo Soares in September 1504. Another important figure was Alee Apule, a Muslim merchant from Edappalli, who supplied substantial quantities of pepper to the Portuguese factory in 1512. The influence of Cherianina and Mamale Marakkar was such that they frequently accompanied the king during official visits to the

Portuguese viceroy at Cochin. Acting as commercial agents, they travelled extensively across the Malabar Coast, procuring pepper at the lowest possible prices and delivering it to the Portuguese factory. Nino Marakkar went so far as to engage in armed conflict against Muslim merchants of Calicut with a force of fifteen hundred men in order to protect Portuguese commercial interests.

Several other intermediaries were equally important to the Portuguese trading network. Coja Mappila, Abraham Mappila Cunheviray, and Mathai Mappila, a Christian merchant from Edappalli, collectively supplied nearly five hundred thousand kilograms of pepper annually to the Portuguese factory. Mahomed Macary emerged as a leading merchant of Calicut who supported Portuguese trade operations from as early as 1513. Coja Byqui, originally from Ormuz but resident in Calicut, was another trusted associate of the Portuguese factory there. Pocaracoa, a Muslim merchant from Cannanore, also maintained commercial ties with the Portuguese.

In the southern regions of Malabar, Mathias and Bragaida Taquatome functioned as principal Portuguese agents in Kayamkulam and Quilon, supplying pepper and other commodities. Mathias and his extended family received regular provisions and financial support from the Portuguese factory in return for their services. Mitos Marakkar supplied cinnamon from Ceylon, while Chaliya Marakkar used his shipping vessels to transport elephants from Malabar to Goa for onward shipment to Portugal. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Portuguese pepper trade at Cochin relied heavily on the services of a prominent businessman, Manuel Ramos, and his family. By the mid sixteenth century, the Portuguese also succeeded in reaching agreements with several major *pardesi* merchants, including Khoja Shams ud din Gilani of Cannanore.

These intermediaries maintained direct contact with cultivators, travelling from village to village and advancing rice, cloth, and cash in exchange for pepper. Muslim and Jewish merchants procured textiles from Cambay and brought them to the Malabar Coast to barter for pepper and other commodities, generating substantial profits. In some cases, intermediaries stored the commodities purchased directly from cultivators and supplied them to the Portuguese upon the arrival of fleets on the Malabar Coast. Through these networks of intermediaries, the Portuguese were able to integrate themselves into existing commercial structures while simultaneously reshaping regional trade practices to serve their monopolistic ambitions.

Commodities and Patterns of Exchange in the Malabar Trade Network

The principal commodities produced in Malabar and the Canara region were pepper, ginger, and other spices. Cinnamon was sourced primarily from Ceylon, while mace, nutmeg, and cloves originated from the Moluccas and Banda Islands. Persia supplied horses and high quality carpets, both of which were highly valued in Portuguese trade. From the African regions of Mozambique, Angola, and neighbouring areas came ivory, slaves, precious metals, stones, and coral. Merchants arriving on the Malabar Coast purchased a wide range of commodities, including pepper, ginger, cinnamon, cardamom, myrabolans, tamarind, precious stones, seed pearls, musk, amber, rhubarb, aloes wood, cotton, sealing wax, jewels, benzoin, silk textiles, preservatives, cloves, nutmeg, mace, sandalwood, brazil wood, porcelain, and numerous other goods.

Not all these commodities were produced locally in Malabar. Many were imported from major trading centres such as Malacca, Ceylon, and Pegu, with Calicut functioning as a major entrepot within the Indian Ocean trade network. Malabar exported coconut, copra, coconut oil, betel nut, jaggery, areca nut, and coir. In return, it imported copper, quicksilver, vermilion, coral from the western Mediterranean, saffron, carpets, porcelain, tin from China, coloured velvets, rose water, knives, camlets, gold, silver, madder, raisins, opium, scarlet dye, woollen textiles, glass beads, brass, and horses. Horses from Persia and rice from Goa and Orissa also formed important imports. From China came gold, silver, copper, ironware, coloured satins, white silk, cotton textiles, blue and white porcelain, beads, camphor, tassels, cardamom, and cloves.

Coastal and Overseas Circuits of Portuguese Commerce

A defining feature of Portuguese trade in Malabar was the combination of coastal, port to port trade and long distance overseas exchange. Ships laden with spices departed from the Malabar Coast for Bengal and the Coromandel Coast during August and returned to Cochin carrying rice. Copper, pepper, and silk from the factories at Cannanore and Cochin were transported to Cambay, where they were exchanged for various types of cloth, indigo, sealing wax, gold, silver coins, and medicinal stones believed to arrest bleeding. Copper exported from Cochin was taken to Ceylon in exchange for cinnamon and other commodities.

Pepper, ginger, nutmeg, rice, and copper from Cannanore and Cochin were shipped to Ormuz, from where horses, silver, and larvae were brought back to India. Pepper enjoyed exceptional demand in Ormuz, where an entire shipload could be sold within an hour. Copper also commanded a strong market in Gujarat, where large quantities could be sold rapidly. Textiles from Gujarat and copper from Europe brought to Cochin were forwarded to Malacca in exchange for nutmeg, mace, cloves, and cinnamon, which were then shipped to Cochin and onward to Portugal. Pepper was also sent from Cochin to China to procure silk, porcelain, satins, brocades, and musk. In addition, spices from Malabar were exported to Mozambique and Sofala on the African coast in exchange for ivory and gold, respectively.

Overland Trade Routes and the Diversion of the Spice Trade

The introduction of Portuguese control mechanisms, such as maritime patrols and the cartaz licensing system on the western coast, disrupted traditional free trade practices and encouraged the diversion of spices through overland routes into Tamil Nadu. Transporting pepper via pack animals across the Western Ghats became profitable for both cultivators and local traders. Pepper, an important element in Tamil culinary culture, witnessed increasing demand, and large quantities were clandestinely moved from Malabar ports to Coromandel ports. In

Tamil Nadu, pepper was exchanged for textiles, which were subsequently carried to Southeast Asia in return for nutmeg, mace, and cloves.

The most effective means of procuring pepper from Malabar involved transporting rice from the Kaveri basin, which led to the expansion of rice pepper exchange circuits between the eastern and western coasts. These circuits were facilitated by Portuguese *casado* intermediaries. Between 1587 and 1598, substantial quantities of rice were imported into Cochin, much of it originating from Tamil ports. Tamil Pattar Brahmins and Ravuthar Muslims associated with Madurai played a crucial role in linking Malabar's interior with Tamil Nadu by transporting cloth, rice, and cereals across the Ghats in exchange for pepper. Many members of these groups settled in pepper producing regions and trading centres of Malabar and later emerged as major suppliers to the Dutch East India Company.

The location of several pre Portuguese Saint Thomas Christian churches along major overland trade routes connecting Malabar to Madurai suggests the participation of Christian pepper cultivating and trading communities in trans Ghats commerce. Multiple routes crossed the Western Ghats, including those passing through Thodupuzha, Kothamangalam, Kanjirappally, and Erattupetta, converging at Cumbamedu or Kumily before reaching Cumbam, Theni, and Madurai. These routes enabled pack animals to transport goods across difficult terrain within a matter of days.

Madurai was not the final destination for much of the pepper diverted from central Malabar. Significant quantities were forwarded to Coromandel ports such as Nagapattinam, Mylapore, Pulicat, and Masulipatnam after meeting the consumption demands of the Kaveri basin elites, including those of Tiruchirappalli and Thanjavur. From these ports, pepper was further distributed to markets in China, Pegu, Bengal, and Mughal territories. Through these interconnected coastal and overland networks, Malabar pepper became deeply embedded in the wider commercial systems of South and Southeast Asia.

The Erosion of Portuguese Power in Malabar

By the close of the sixteenth century, Portuguese dominance and prestige in the Indian Ocean, particularly along the Malabar Coast, began to show clear signs of decline. Local rulers who had grown increasingly dissatisfied with Portuguese high handed conduct identified a viable alternative in the Dutch and welcomed their arrival as a counterbalance to Portuguese authority. Acts of piracy and coercion by the Portuguese provoked resentment among coastal rulers, who gradually withdrew their support and aligned themselves with the Dutch. Early Dutch engagement with Malabar clearly reflected this shift, as demonstrated by the treaty negotiated with the Zamorin of Calicut in 1604, which was explicitly aimed at expelling the Portuguese from his territories.

Dutch naval successes further accelerated the decline of Portuguese influence. In 1602, the fleet of the Dutch East India Company defeated Portuguese forces near Bantam, effectively opening the routes to the Moluccas. By 1603, Dutch naval power had grown sufficiently strong to threaten Goa, the principal Portuguese stronghold in India. The capture of the Moluccas by the Dutch in 1641 marked a decisive setback for Portuguese ambitions in Southeast Asia. This was followed by the Dutch consolidation of power in Ceylon in 1658, driving the Portuguese out after prolonged conflict. Subsequently, the Dutch captured several Portuguese strongholds on the Malabar Coast, including Quilon, Cranganore, Purakkad, Cochin, and Cannanore. The fall of Cochin in 1663 is generally regarded as the final and most decisive blow to Portuguese power in Malabar.

The inability of the Portuguese to establish a durable territorial base in India, particularly in Malabar, was ultimately inevitable. Their early success rested largely on naval supremacy at a time when other European competitors were absent. Once rival powers entered the Indian Ocean, Portuguese weaknesses became increasingly apparent. Corruption among officials, many of whom prioritised private trade over state interests, seriously undermined Portuguese authority. This situation worsened as the Portuguese crown hesitated to provide regular salaries to civil and military officers, leading to the auctioning of public offices and the spread of nepotism. Further contributing to the decline were rigid religious policies, excessive use of violence, internal administrative rivalries, and the political consequences of Portugal's absorption into the Spanish empire under Philip II in 1580. Portuguese revenues were increasingly diverted to finance European wars, religious institutions, and administrative excesses. The resulting administrative laxity, coupled with growing alienation of the local population due to religious intolerance, significantly weakened Portuguese control over Malabar.

Political and Economic Consequences of Portuguese Intervention in Malabar

One of the most significant political consequences of Portuguese intervention in Malabar was the exposure of the absence of a strong centralised state, in contrast to northern India. The shifting balance of power became increasingly visible as the presence of the Portuguese weakened the authority of major rulers and emboldened minor rajas to assert greater autonomy. While three dominant kings had earlier claimed sovereignty over subordinate chiefs, Portuguese involvement strengthened smaller principalities, a trend that continued into subsequent centuries.

This transformation also reshaped the regional trading landscape. Ports such as Cochin, Parur, and Vettathunad gained prominence, while traditional centres of trade declined. The long established commercial networks dominated by Muslim merchants, Venetians, Genoese, and other trading communities were disrupted by Portuguese depredations during the sixteenth century. Many merchant groups either withdrew from Malabar altogether or realigned their commercial interests in favour of Portuguese controlled trade. As a result, the scope and nature of mercantile participation in Malabar underwent substantial reconfiguration.

The coastal towns of Quilon and Cranganore experienced a decline in importance, while Cochin and Chaliyam rose to prominence under Portuguese patronage. The deterioration of trade at Calicut was not due to an absence of Portuguese commercial activity but rather the breakdown of the port's long standing atmosphere of peaceful exchange. This shift benefited Cochin, where the Portuguese found a more secure and accommodating political environment. Chaliyam, located within the territory of a Zamorin feudatory, developed as a strategic port designed to divert trade away from Calicut and monitor the Zamorin's growing power.

Portuguese presence also introduced several material and technological changes. New crops such as cashew nut, tobacco, pineapple, and guava were introduced into Malabar. Coir emerged as a major export commodity due to the expansion of shipbuilding activities, and coconut cultivation increasingly assumed a commercial character, with large quantities exported overseas. Portuguese influence further extended to shipbuilding techniques, resulting in the construction of larger vessels in which coir was widely used.

CONCLUSION

As pioneers of European expansion in the Indian Ocean, the Portuguese profoundly transformed the political and commercial structures of Malabar. Their arrival marked a decisive shift in regional trade practices, as commerce was institutionalised through administrative offices and specialised officials rather than conducted as a decentralized mercantile activity. The emergence of Cochin as the principal trading centre of Malabar was closely tied to Portuguese political and military patronage, often at the expense of older ports that had flourished earlier. Politically, the rise of the Cochin principality as a major regional power was closely linked to Portuguese support. The Portuguese also introduced new commodities, reconfigured existing trade routes, and integrated Malabar more firmly into global commercial networks. While their dominance was ultimately short lived, the structural changes they introduced in trade, politics, and material culture left a lasting imprint on the history of Malabar and the wider Indian Ocean world.

REFERENCES

1. Boxer, C. R. *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415–1825*. Hutchinson, 1969.
2. Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History*. Longman, 1993.
3. Pearson, M. N. *The Indian Ocean*. Routledge, 2003.
4. Chaudhuri, K. N. *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*. Cambridge UP, 1985.
5. Panikkar, K. M. *Asia and Western Dominance*. George Allen & Unwin, 1959.
6. Panikkar, K. M. *Malabar and the Portuguese*. Bombay: D. B. Taraporevala Sons, 1929.
7. Prange, Sebastian R. *Monsoon Islam: Trade and Faith on the Medieval Malabar Coast*. Cambridge UP, 2018.
8. Das Gupta, Ashin. *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500–1800*. Oxford UP, 2001.
9. Disney, A. R. *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire, Vol. 2: The Portuguese Empire*. Cambridge UP, 2009.
10. Mathew, K. S. *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*. Manohar, 1983.
11. Sheriff, Abdul. *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean*. Hurst, 2010.
12. Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. "Iranians Abroad: Intra Asian Elite Migration and Early Modern State Formation." *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 51, no. 2, 1992, pp. 340–363.
13. Digby, Simon. "The Broader Maritime Context of the Rise of the Mughal Empire." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 17, 1974, pp. 287–328.
14. Ray, Haraprasad. *Colonial Penetration and Economic Restructuring in India*. Oxford UP, 1988.
15. Wink, André. *Al Hind: The Making of the Indo Islamic World, Vol. II*. Brill, 1997.
16. Arunachalam, M. *The Merchants of South India*. New Century Book House, 1996.
17. Pearson, M. N. "Littoral Society: The Concept and the Problems." *Journal of World History*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2006, pp. 353–373.
18. Bethencourt, Francisco. *Racisms: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century*. Princeton UP, 2013.