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**The History of the growth of the Latin Catholic
Church in Trivandrum (1500-1600)**

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the origins and growth of the Latin Catholic Church in Trivandrum between 1500 and 1600, within the larger historical context of Portuguese expansion in South India. Before landing of the Portuguese, Trivandrum, located on Kerala's Malabar Coast, was home to a wide range of faiths, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Judaism, and the ancient St. Thomas Christian tradition. The Portuguese arrival in India in 1498 created a new dynamic that included trade, empire, and evangelism under the *Padroado Régio* (Royal Patronage). Missionaries, particularly those of the Franciscan, Dominican, and Jesuit orders, were important in creating the Latin Church through catechesis, community development, and the adaptation of Christian teaching to local reality.

The study depends on original materials such as missionary letters, papal decrees, and colonial documents, as well as secondary works by scholars such as Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Teotonio R. de Souza, and George Menachery. It says that the expansion of the Latin Catholic Church in Trivandrum was not an effect of colonial power, but rather the outcome of intricate processes of cultural negotiation, social transformation, and local engagement. The early Latin communities, particularly among marginalised fishing castes like the Mukkuvars and Paravars, recognised Christianity as both a religion and a way to social dignity. Despite the challenges of poverty and discrimination, they developed a strong spiritual identity that transformed the Church into a source of unity, education, and hope.

This thesis demonstrates that the Church's establishment in Trivandrum was not an external imposition, but rather a living encounter between Portuguese missionary dedication and Kerala people's enduring faith an encounter that continues to shape the region's religious and cultural identity today.

Keywords: Trivandrum, Portuguese Missionaries, Kerala, Malabar Coast, *Padroado Régio* (Royal Patronage), St. Thomas Christians.

Resumo

Esta tese investiga as origens e o crescimento da Igreja Católica Latina em Trivandrum entre 1500 e 1600, dentro do contexto histórico mais amplo da expansão portuguesa no sul da Índia. Antes do desembarque dos portugueses, Trivandrum, localizada na Costa Malabar de Kerala, era o lar de uma ampla gama de religiões, incluindo hinduísmo, budismo, jainismo, islamismo, judaísmo e a antiga tradição cristã de São Tomás. A chegada dos portugueses à Índia em 1498 criou uma nova dinâmica que incluiu o comércio, o império e o evangelismo sob o *Padroado Régio* (Patrocínio Real). Os missionários, particularmente os das ordens franciscana, dominicana e jesuíta, foram importantes na criação da Igreja latina através da catequese, do desenvolvimento comunitário e da adaptação do ensino cristão à realidade local.

O estudo depende de materiais originais, como cartas missionárias, decretos papais e documentos coloniais, bem como obras secundárias de estudiosos como Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Teotônio R. de Souza e George Menachery. Diz que a expansão da Igreja Católica Latina em Trivandrum não foi um efeito do poder colonial, mas sim o resultado de intrincados processos de negociação cultural, transformação social e envolvimento local. As primeiras comunidades latinas, particularmente entre castas de pesca marginalizadas como os Mukkuvars e Paravars, reconheceram o cristianismo como uma religião e um caminho para a dignidade social. Apesar dos desafios da pobreza e da discriminação, desenvolveram uma forte identidade espiritual que transformou a Igreja numa fonte de unidade, educação e esperança.

Esta tese demonstra que o estabelecimento da Igreja em Trivandrum não foi uma imposição externa, mas sim um encontro vivo entre a dedicação missionária portuguesa e a fé duradoura do povo de Kerala, um encontro que continua a moldar a identidade religiosa e cultural da região nos dias de hoje.

Palavras-chave: Trivandrum, Missionários Portugueses, Kerala, Costa do Malabar, *Padroado Régio* (Padroeiro Real), Cristãos de S. Tomás.

Introduction

The history of the Latin Catholic Church in Kerala, particularly in Trivandrum, is deeply linked with the greater transformations that changed South India in the 16th century. Trivandrum (modern-day Thiruvananthapuram), located on the Malabar Coast, held an important strategic position in the Indian Ocean territory. For centuries before to the arrival of the Portuguese, this region served as the meeting point of civilisations. Merchants from Arabia, Persia, and even the Mediterranean visited its ports, while indigenous religious traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism coexisted with Judaism, Islam, and the early arrival of St. Thomas Christians. The Malabar Coast, known for its spice trade, served as both an economic hub and a cultural crossroads where different faiths, cultures, and traditions came together. Latin Catholicism was introduced into this diverse and exchanging society when the Portuguese arrived in 1498.

Vasco da Gama's journey to Calicut was a breakthrough moment in both international navigation and commerce, as well as Kerala's religious history. The Portuguese Crown, encouraged by the structure of *Padroado Régio* (that is Royal Patronage), saw its overseas mission as a mix of commerce, empire, and evangelisation. The search of spices, the expansion of imperial authority, and the spread of Christianity were all closely connected. The arrival of missionaries, like traders and soldiers, was not an accident, but rather an essential part of the Portuguese enterprise. In areas like Trivandrum, which already had a complex religious structure, the Latin Church was brought as both a spiritual presence and an instrument of colonial power. The expansion of the Latin Catholic Church between 1500 and 1600 must thus be viewed not merely as the product of missionary enthusiasm, but also as the result of complex processes of trade, politics, and cultural negotiation.

The word "Latin Catholics" brings up images of a powerful European and American Church based on the Roman liturgical tradition. In Kerala, however, the story is very different. Far from being affluent, Latin Catholics were one of the most socially marginalised communities in the state. The community, classified by the Kerala government as "Other Backward Classes," is made up of St. Thomas Christians who converted to the Latin Rite during Portuguese control, Anglo-Indians, and a significant number of converts from Hindu castes such as the Mukkuvars, Nadars, Izhavas, and Dalits.

The heterogeneous origin marked their social identity with a sense of backwardness, often reinforced by external classification. E.P. Antony is one of the historians who showed how caste identities of Latin Catholics were misrepresented in school registers, government records, and even parish documents. In Trivandrum, members of St. Antony's Church of Kamukincode, and St. Peter's Church of Kochupally, identified themselves as "Ezhava Latin Catholics," while others were recorded as Nadar Christians, Bharatha Christians, or as converts from Pulaya and Paraya backgrounds. In the diocese of Vijayapuram, many were officially labeled as Cherama or Sambava Christians. These misclassifications not only obscured the Latin Catholic identity but also deprived those Christians from access to reservation benefits in education and employment, thereby perpetuating their backwardness.

The lack of religious authority in the early centuries exacerbated this marginalisation. The centralised administrative structures of the Latin Church under foreign prelates provided little opportunity for lay involvement in the growth of local leadership. Individuals from the community who made major contributions to areas such as politics, art, or commerce were often discouraged or stigmatised, and their achievements went unreported. Yet, the Latin Catholics were pioneers in various fields in Kerala. They were among the first to own ships, start printing and develop journalism, and influence cultural manifestations like music and drama. Nonetheless, restricted policies, internal divisions, and insufficient educational opportunities kept these attempts from resulting in broader improvements in society.

The situation in Trivandrum reflects these broader dynamics in sharp relief. The Latin Catholic population has traditionally been concentrated in fishing communities such as Vizhinjam, Pulluvila, Poonthura, Poovar, and Anjengo. These communities were among the poorest in the region, struggling with poverty, illiteracy, overpopulation, and the effects of societal customs like dowry. Women remained marginalized, their role in parish life largely restricted to pious associations, while men dominated church committees and administration. Alcoholism, lack of education, and inadequate pastoral planning compounded their difficulties. Yet, for all their poverty and backwardness, the community developed a remarkable resilience rooted in its religious identity.

The Church was not only the spiritual center of their lives but also the nucleus of their social world. Parish committees, led by local elites known as *Pradhani*, functioned almost like village assemblies, mediating disputes and organizing communal life. On

Sundays, churches were filled to overflowing; no one go to sea to fish, and women stayed away from markets in observance of the Sabbath. Religious observance was strict and piety was deeply ingrained. This cohesion allowed the community to mobilize collectively in moments of crisis. One striking example is their political action in 1957, when thousands of Christian fisherfolk in Trivandrum marched against the Communist government in defense of educational institutions. Although the community remained largely illiterate, its ability to organize and resist testified to a strength that belied its marginalized social status. This paradox—of poverty and resilience, of marginality and agency forms an essential background to understanding the history of their growth.

It is within this context that the present study situates the growth of the Latin Catholic Church in Trivandrum during the 16th century. The questions it addresses are interrelated: What was the religious landscape of Trivandrum before the Portuguese arrival? How did Portuguese colonial expansion alter local governance, commerce, and religion? What strategies did missionaries employ in establishing Latin Christian communities? And what legacy did the Church of the 16th century leave for the centuries that followed? The answers to these questions reveal that the Church's growth was not a straightforward story of conversion and expansion but rather a complex process shaped by negotiation, adaptation, resistance, and reform.

The methodology of this research combines primary sources such as missionary correspondence, papal decrees, Portuguese colonial records, and ecclesiastical documents with secondary studies by leading historians of Portuguese expansion and Indian Christianity. The works of scholars such as Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Teotonio R. de Souza, George Menachery, and Francis Robinson are particularly valuable in situating the growth of the Latin Church within the broader dynamics of colonial power, trade, and cultural exchange. Ethnographic sources and oral histories, meanwhile, shed light on the lived experiences of local converts, whose voices are often absent from official accounts. This combination of sources allows for a more nuanced understanding of the Church's establishment, not as a unilateral imposition from above but as a process negotiated within the pluralistic and vibrant society of Kerala.

The structure of this study reflects these aims. The first chapter examines the pre-Portuguese religious landscape of Trivandrum, considering indigenous faiths, the influence of St. Thomas Christians, the role of local rulers, and the impact of trade and cultural exchanges. The second chapter explores the arrival of the Portuguese in India

between 1498 and 1600, their encounters with Indian coastal kingdoms, the establishment of the Estado da Índia, and the economic and cultural consequences of their presence. The third chapter focuses on the growth of the Latin Catholic Church in Trivandrum, analyzing early missionary efforts, the establishment of parishes and institutions, the role of colonial power, and the reforms introduced by the Synod of Diamper in 1599.

In tracing this trajectory, the study argues that the growth of the Latin Catholic Church in Trivandrum between 1500 and 1600 was deeply embedded in the intersection of colonial ambition, religious pluralism, and local social realities. It was neither a purely ecclesiastical phenomenon nor a purely political one, but rather a process shaped by the confluence of trade, power, and faith. The 16th century not only laid the foundations for the Latin Church in Trivandrum but also established patterns of identity, marginalization, and resilience that continue to characterize the community to this day.

Chapter 1

The Pre-Portuguese Religious Landscape in Trivandrum

The Trivandrum is a city today known as Thiruvananthapuram. This is one of the districts in Kerala. Before the arrival of the Portuguese this place was characterised by the spiritual practices related to Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism. And there were early forms of Christianity. To understand the later development and founding of the Latin Catholic Church in Trivandrum between 1500 and 1600 we must have a solid knowledge of the pre-Portuguese religious environment.

The state of Kerala was known as the Malabar. The Malabar coast was an attractive place for the merchants from different places from around the world and it was the center of the maritime trade. The continuous flow of the traders promoted cultural and religious contacts and economic relationships. This also included the earliest Christians, a community which is believed to have been founded by St. Thomas the Apostle.

There are some writings say that St. Thomas arrived on the shores of the Malabar coast (present-day Kerala) in A.D. 52. He preached the Gospel and baptised Hindu Brahmin families and founded seven churches and, in the year 72, died a martyr's death.

In this chapter our aim is to present the pre-Portuguese religious environment of the Trivandrum, which was focused on the religious diversity, the interaction with the local rulers, the religious communities and the cultural and the economic context.

1.1 Religious Diversity in Pre-Portuguese Trivandrum

“Trivandrum, (Thiruvananthapuram¹ in Malayalam), is the southern most district of the Kerala state.”² “As of 2011, the Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation had a population of 957,730 over an area of 214.86 sq. km making it the largest and most populous city in Kerala. The larger Thiruvananthapuram metropolitan area had over 1.7

¹ Thiruvananthapuram is a relatively modern region with trading traditions dating back to 1000 BCE. It is believed that the ships of King Solomon landed in a port called Ophir (now Poovar) in Thiruvananthapuram in 1036 BCE. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thiruvananthapuram>.

² Selvester Ponnuthan, “The spirituality of the Basic ecclesial communities in the socio-religious context of Trivandrum/Kerala,India”p.62.

million inhabitants within an area of 543sq. km.”³ “Thiruvananthapuram city and other places in the district loom large in ancient tradition, folklore and literature. The place had earlier been frequented by the Portuguese and later by the Dutch. It was from here that the English gradually extended their domain to other parts of Thiruvithamcore (Travancore⁴).”⁵

“The Trivandrum city takes its name from the deity of the celebrated Hindu temple of Ananta Sayanam (Sri Padmanabha)⁶. ‘Trivandrum was the capital of the princely state of Travancore, which was ruled by’ Hindu Kings and Queens, and it continues to be the state capital of the present-day Kerala.”⁷ The origin of the people who lived in Trivandrum was the Dravidic. Here we couldn’t see any cast distinction in the beginning. They were the Hindu religion, and they had a symbol of their religion on the temple of Sri Padmanabhaswamy⁸. Towards the end of the 12th century A.D., Kerala became a fully-fledged feudal society with its peculiar socio-religious institutions, customs and usages. The spread of Christianity and Islam added many divisions in the society, though Trivandrum as such has never been under a foreign ruler⁹.

1.1.1 Overview of the Religious practices: Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism

Kerala became a meeting place for all the Indian religions and philosophical systems at a very early period of its history. Foreign religion such as Christianity and Islam are well rooted in Kerala adding to the multiplicity of the already mentioned native religions which included Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism. Generally, there was religious harmony among the religions. Nevertheless, gradually there were a lot of changes in the attitude towards religions, as religion in Kerala became more of a cultural

³ See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thiruvananthapuram>

⁴ It is the kingdom of Travancore also known as the king of Thiruvithamkoor or later as Travancore state, was a kingdom that lasted from c 1729 until 1949. It was ruled by the Travancore Royal Family, from Padmanabhapuram, and later Thiruvananthapuram. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Travancore>

⁵ See <http://www.kerala.gov.in/knowkerala/tvm.htm>

⁶ Cf. Selvester Ponnuthan, “The spirituality of the Basic ecclesial communities in the socio-religious context of Trivandrum/Kerala,India”p.62.

⁷ Ibid., 63.

⁸ Padmanabhaswamy temple is a hindu temple dedicated to Vishnu in Thiruvananthapuram the capital of the state of Kerala, India. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Padmanabhaswamy_Temple

⁹ Selvester Ponnuthan, “The spirituality of the Basic ecclesial communities in the socio-religious context of Trivandrum/Kerala,India”p.64.

inheritance rather than the fact of one's conviction¹⁰. Both Jainism and Buddhism originated as a reaction to Brahmanical authority and its ritualistic religiosity. They are known as sramana or nastika against astika (Brahmanic) religions. They followed a set of principles and admitted into their communion the common people notwithstanding the cast and creed¹¹.

Jainism

Jainism¹², is one of the three most ancient Indian religious systems in Kerala, in South India. Jainism was probably introduced into Kerala in the 3rd century B.C. The central virtue of Jainism is ahimsa or non-injury to living beings, which has much influenced the non-violent policy of Mahatma Gandhi. It was with the Saivite and Vaisnavite movements that Jainism declined in Kerala¹³.

Buddhism

Buddhism was brought to the South India by the Buddhist missionaries, probably through the region of Ashoka in the 3rd century B.C.¹⁴ Buddhism, also known as Buddha Dharma and Dharmavinaya, is an Indian religion and philosophical tradition based on teachings attributed to the Buddha a wandering teacher who lived in the 6th or 5th century BCE.¹⁵

According to Buddhism, our actions “should be controlled by the Five Precepts: One should refrain from taking life, from taking what is not given, from wrong sex, from wrong speech, and from drugs-substances which obstruct self-awareness.”¹⁶

¹⁰ Selvester Ponnunmuthan, “The spirituality of the Basic ecclesial communities in the socio-religious context of Trivandrum/Kerala,India” 85. see also J.T. ERINJRY, *Coalition Game Politics*, 15.

¹¹ AA. VV., *The Cultural Heritage of India*, 1. and also see Selvester Ponnunmuthan, “The spirituality of the Basic ecclesial communities in the socio-religious context of Trivandrum/Kerala,India”86.

¹² Jainism also known as Jain Dharma is an Indian religion. Jainism traces its spiritual ideas and history through the succession of twenty-four thrithankaras (supreme preachers of dharma), with the first and the current time cycle being Rishabhadeva, who tradition holds, lived millions of years ago, the twenty-third thrithankara Parshvanatha, traditionally dated to the 9th century BCE, and the twenty-fourth trithankara Mahavira, historically around the 6th or 5th BCE. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jainism>

¹³ Selvester Ponnunmuthan, “The spirituality of the Basic ecclesial communities in the socio-religious context of Trivandrum/Kerala,India” 85. see also J.T. ERINJRY, *Coalition Game Politics*, 86.

¹⁴ A.Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, (Kottayam: D.C. books, 2007), 92. See also Selvester Ponnunmuthan, “*The spirituality of the Basic ecclesial communities in the socio-religious context of Trivandrum/Kerala,India*” 85. see also J.T. ERINJRY, *Coalition Game Politics*, 86.

¹⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism>

¹⁶ N. SMART, *The World's Religions*, 63.

The Buddha taught many things to the people. He was against the animal sacrifices. The Buddha taught all the people to be merciful to all the living being. “His earnest exhortation for practicing righteousness and self-renunciation, his message to the people in their own vernacular language and his exhortation for abolition of castes made his religion popular. However, Buddhism faded in Kerala as a religion, though the doctrines are very much appreciated.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, from a Christian perspective, even engaging in conversation with Hindus requires a solid grasp of Buddhism.

Jainism and Buddhism are considered to be atheism by other religions, since they considered there is no concept of God in these religions.

Hinduism

Hinduism is a very comprehensive term and has many shades and degrees of varying forms in it ranging from Brahmanism, the highest, the purest and the most philosophical form of theism, to the fetish worship of the aboriginal castes, which is the religion of the crudest type imaginable.¹⁸ Hinduism was not a real name of the religion. It had another name called Sanatan Dharma. The name Hinduism was given by the foreigners. “The original and more suggestive name is *Sanatana Dharma*, which stands for the eternal spiritual truths enunciated by the Vedic seers. In the past, river Indus formed the north western boundary of India. It was then called Sindhu. The Persians pronounced it as «Hindu» and therefore began to designate the Aryans living on the side of the river as Hindus, and their religion Hinduism. The name possessed nothing more than a territorial significance and conveyed on hints or suggestions about the religion of the people to whom it was applied. With the passage of time the word Hinduism supplanted the original name Sanatan Dharma.”¹⁹ Hinduism is the most important and largest religion in India. Hinduism is not a monotheist religion. It has many God concepts. Here the God concepts come from their scriptures like *Upanishads* and *Vedas*. These scriptures have emerged from the spiritual exercises, meditations and reflections and

¹⁷ Selvester Ponnuthan, “*The spirituality of the Basic ecclesial communities in the socio-religious context of Trivandrum/Kerala, India*” 85. see also J.T. ERINJRY, *Coalition Game Politics*, 87.

¹⁸ V.N. Aiya, *Travancore State Manual*, II, 39. See also Selvester Ponnuthan, “*The spirituality of the Basic ecclesial communities in the socio-religious context of Trivandrum/Kerala, India*” 85. see also J.T. ERINJRY, *Coalition Game Politics*, 88.

¹⁹ J.P. SUDA, *Religions of India*, 44. See also Selvester Ponnuthan, “*The spirituality of the Basic ecclesial communities in the socio-religious context of Trivandrum/Kerala, India*” 85. see also J.T. ERINJRY, *Coalition Game Politics*, 88.

observations. And the God concepts from the emerged from the different philosophies and theologies. In Hinduism Brahman is the one and only infinite reality. He is the ever present, all the powerful and beyond the comprehension. It can be formless and without attributes but manifests in form. Brahman is supreme and transcendent. The world is also manifestation of Brahman, the universe and Absolute are not two but one.’’²⁰

According to Hinduism the present life always depends on a previous life. Hence, human life is called Karma-Samsara, a cycle of birth and rebirth determined by the law of retribution²¹. It would be an exaggeration to say that without Hinduism India would be a geographical expression of the past, a dim memory of a perished glory²². Unlike Islam and Christianity, the Hinduism never try to convert any other person from another religion. Because, the Hinduism has its own highly spiritual practice. In Hinduism the God Brahma is like a father. The gods of the Hinduism have their own power, colour and the faculties. And the believers are considered like brothers. ‘‘The Brahmins incorporated this doctrine of Brahma’s children in their religion and sacred books. Thus, the *Rig-Veda*, the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and *Manu’s Codex* have all sanctified the castes and have raised their rule to a preferment of a supreme religious duty, under the pro-opus title *Varnashrama Dharma*, which denies salvation outside it.’’²³

For the better understanding of Hinduism we have to read doctrines or scriptures like Vedas, Puranas and Ithihasas- Ramayana and Mahabharata. The Gita, the song divine in the Mahabharata, is a unique work which not only represents the philosophy of Hinduism but also reveals certain definite schemes by which every individual can work out his own self-improvement²⁴. In Hinduism the believers worship the one supreme God in three aspects like Brahma, Siva and Visnu. They are representing threefold function like Brahma is a creator, Visnu is a saviour, and the Siva is like destruction. On the popular

²⁰ Ben James Maliakal, *The Origin and Spread of Christianity in Malabar (Kerala): Scenario prior to the European advent (1498 AD)*, 44-45.

²¹ J.P. SUDA, *Religions of India*, 44. See also Selvester Ponnunmuthan, ‘‘*The spirituality of the Basic ecclesial communities in the socio-religious context of Trivandrum/Kerala, India*’’ 88.

²² J.P. SUDA, *Religions of India*, 44.

²³ Maliakal, James, Bem, *The Origin and Spread of Christianity in Malabar (Kerala): Scenario prior to the European advent (1498 AD)*, 46.

²⁴ M.D. CHATURVEDI, *Hinduism*, 51-53. See also Selvester Ponnunmuthan, ‘‘*The spirituality of the Basic ecclesial communities in the socio-religious context of Trivandrum/Kerala, India*’’ 85. see also J.T. ERINJRY, *Coalition Game Politics*, 89.

level all the prerogatives of the Supreme Reality are attributed to personal gods: Visnu (Vaisnavisam) and Siva (Saivisam)²⁵.

1.1.2 The Influence of Hinduism in Trivandrum

In Trivandrum, Hinduism is the major and most important religion. Because, the state has supported with all its wealth, power and the social influences. According to S. Mateer, who studied the native lives of the people, Travancore retains the observance of most of the laws and institutions of Hinduism in their primitive form of obligation²⁶. The believers of the Trivandrum were worshipping the god Visnu and they accepted this like national deity of the Trivandrum. According to the Hindu religion there were many festivals in Travancore. One of the most and important festival is 'Aratu'. It can be also called the 'bathing festival'. They celebrate this festival twice in a year (April and October).

In Hinduism they worship animals like cow and trees and plants like Asvatha, Bilva and the Tulasi. These are very important for worshipping of God. And the plant Tulasi is the sacred to the god Visnu. Women are worshipping this plant daily in their house. Its wood is used for making rosaries which are worn round the neck and used for ejaculatory prayers²⁷.

1.1.3 Influence of Syrian Christianity and early Christian communities on the Malabar Coast.

We believe that the actual Christianity starts from the arrival of the Portuguese people. The history of the Christians of the Kerala is identical to that of the Christian faith. The history says that St. Thoams (Apostle of Jesus) came to the south part of the India and he converted many peoples especially Hindus to Christianity. This group is generally known as Syrian Christians or St. Thomas Christians²⁸ as they use "Syriac"

²⁵ D. ACHARUPARAMBIL, «*Hinduism*», 259. See also Selvister Ponnunmuthan, «*The spirituality of the Basic ecclesial communities in the socio-religious context of Trivandrum/Kerala, India*» 85. see also J.T. ERINJRY, *Coalition Game Politics*, 90.

²⁶ Selvister Ponnunmuthan, «*The spirituality of the Basic ecclesial communities in the socio-religious context of Trivandrum/Kerala, India*» 85. see also J.T. ERINJRY, *Coalition Game Politics*, 90.

²⁷ V.N. AIYA, *Travancore State Manual*, II, 58.

²⁸ The term Thomas Christians now denotes the most ancient Christians of India who have their origin Malabar (Where the Malayalam language is spoken and now known as Kerala), the South-West cost of India. They have the proofs and the faith that Apostles St. Thomas as the one who converted their forefathers to Christian faith. Formally they were Thomas Christians in different parts of the India and

language for worship.’’²⁹ St. Thomas is the first person planted the Christianity in India. For this first St. Thomas Christians, they have their tradition of Christian faith since 52 A.D.³⁰

‘‘The mother tongue of Thomas Christian is Malayalam, one of the Dravidian languages of India. Their hieratic language is Syriac, which they were using for the liturgy services, and it also known as East Syriac or Chaldaic language. Later there were use of the West-Syriac language in the liturgy of among some Thomas Christian communities.’’³¹

Before the arriving of the Portuguese missionaries all the Christian churches of India is identified with the Syrian Christians or the St. Thomas Christians. There were some local priests in the Thomas Christians, and they were called like *Archdeacons*. The Church of ‘‘all India’’, therefore, gravitated towards Malabar.³² Here the priests were serving as the political and the social leaders. ‘‘St. Thomas Christians first refused the diverse system of faith and liturgy of Persian church. But later the majority of them became part of it. There were different groups of Christians: those who accepted the East-Syrian rite and others remained in the Apostolic tradition of faith. This division made many social conflicts and confusion among the Christians of Malabar. But the domain of the Persian church was growing very fast.’’³³

The traditional believe is that St. Thomas founded seven Christian communities at Palayoor, Cranganore, Parur, Kokkamangalam, Kollam (Quilon), Niranam and Chayal.³⁴ St. Thomas deposited only the basic elements of faith in the Malabar. Most of the people from were Dravidians and they did not have any temple to worship. They were using the nature temple called *Kavukal*³⁵ and it is believed that the Christians were also praying in the nature like under the tree. According to tradition Thomas of Cana

outside. See Maliakal, James, Bem, *The Origin and Spread of Christianity in Malabar (Kerala): Scenario prior to the European advent (1498 AD)*, 48.

²⁹ Rajan S. Irudaya, James K.S. *Indian Parish Records : a Qualitative Assessment. In: Annales de démographie historique, 2000-1. Les Français d'Amérique*, 93.

³⁰ Podipara, *The Thomas Christians and Their Syriac Treasures*, 9.

³¹ Podipara, 9.

³² Podipara, 3.

³³ Ben James Maliakal, *The Origin and Spread of Christianity in Malabar (Kerala): Scenario prior to the European advent (1498 AD)*, 49.

³⁴ Selvester Ponnunmuthan, ‘‘The spirituality of the Basic ecclesial communities in the socio-religious context of Trivandrum/Kerala, India’’ 98.

³⁵ Kavukal is the plural of Malayalam word Kavuvu. Kavuvu is the traditional name given for sacred groves across the Malabar coast in Kerala, South India. Kavuvus are notable for *Theyyam*, the centuries-old ritual dance. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kavuvu>

strengthened the Christians in Malabar.³⁶ It is from the time of Thomas of Cana we find a better contact between the Christians of Kerala and the Persian Churches.³⁷ But in the history of the Syrian Christianity we can understand that, before the arrival of Portuguese some of the Christians communities had relations with the Persian churches. And they saw that the liturgy of the Syrian community is different from the Roman Christianity.

There is evidence that the Syrians Christians were existing in Malabar before the arrival of the Portuguese. “In Malabar there existed from times immemorial a community called “St. Thomas Christians”. They observe a national holiday on July 3rd, which is believed to be the day of his martyrdom. this feast called *Duharana* (a Syriac word meanings commemoration) became a great custom and is a proof of Apostle’s mission in India. In the Latin Church the feast of 21st December started only in 495 AD. The divine of the Syriac rite for July 3rd with its octave, repeats that same tradition.³⁸

“Every year until 1653, at least once in his lifetime, every Christian made a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Thomas at Mylapore. To give alms for this pilgrimage was a glorious custom among the St. Thomas Christians. The name of Thomas is given to at least one child in each family. No other nation claims the tomb of St. Thomas…nobody claims the introduction of Christianity in Malabar, not even the Church of Mesopotamia.”³⁹

A distinguished scholar of Alexandria is said to have visited India between 189 and 190. He attested to the presence of Christians in the second century.⁴⁰ And some of the Church Fathers like Origen, Pantaenus, St. Ephrem, St. Athanasius, St. Ambrose of Milan, St. John Chrisostom etc. also wrote and taught about the mission and martyrdom of St. Thomas of India.⁴¹

³⁶ C.M. AGUR, *Church History*, 29.

³⁷ Selvester Ponnunmuthan, “*The spirituality of the Basic ecclesial communities in the socio-religious context of Trivandrum/Kerala,India*” 99.

³⁸ Kaithanal, *Christianity in Malabar*, 8–9. Also See Ben James Maliakal, *The Origin and Spread of Christianity in Malabar (Kerala): Scenario prior to the European advent (1498 AD)*, 42.

³⁹ Kaithanal, 11.

⁴⁰ Pallath Paul, “*The Catholic Church In India*” 28.

⁴¹ Ben James Maliakal, *The Origin and Spread of Christianity in Malabar (Kerala): Scenario prior to the European advent (1498 AD)*, 31-35.

According to this we can understand there were early Christians (Syrian or St. Thomas Christians) in the Malabar coast. These teaching shows us what are the influences of Syrian Christians made in the Malabar.

“These Christians faithfully preserved and diligently observed throughout the centuries the ‘way or law of Thomas’ because they were fully convinced that this way had been taught to their forefathers by the Apostle Thomas himself.”⁴²

1.1.4 The Influence of the Jews

The history says that the Jews had a trade relationship with the port of the Malabar. From the 1000 B.C. the Jews especially the king Solomon continued this trade relation (commerce of spices) with the Malabar. At the time of the King Solomon the Jews are the first people who approached the people of Dravidians.⁴³ They approached them for the trade goods like precious stones, vegetables, ivory etc. Because the Malabar coast was well known to the Eastern nations.

“As early as the time of Moses...this commerce existed, for cinnamon and cassia played a part in the temple services of the Jews (Ex. 30, 23-24), and at any rate the commerce existed in the time of King Solomon (970 BC-931 BC)”.⁴⁴

At that time throughout the east the Jews were using the Aramaic language (the commercial language).⁴⁵ When we look into the Indian church history we can understand there were existing some Jews colonies like Cranganore, Paravur, Quilon, Muttam, Chenot etc. which is the part of the Malabar. The history teaches us that St. Thomas was travelled through these colonies.⁴⁶ In the beginning St. Thomas preached the Gospel in these Jews colonies and established the churches here. Because in these colonies found the seven churches by the Apostle St. Thomas.⁴⁷

⁴² Pallath Paul, “*The Catholic Church In India*” 27-28.

⁴³ Philip Kaithanal, *Christianity in Malabar* (Trichinopoly, India: The Catholic Truth Society of India, 1938), 4.

⁴⁴ Logan, *Malabar Manual*, 1:246.

⁴⁵ Pallath Paul, “*The Catholic Church In India*” 26.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

“Hence the primitive St. Thomas Christian community of India might have consisted of a Jewish Christian nucleus and a majority of those who had embraced the Christian faith from different section of the native population.”⁴⁸

St. Thomas started his evangelization in Jewish communities. Because it was easy to the St. Thomas to preach the evangelization in community of Jews. The presence of the Jews was the one of the main reasons of the Apostle of the Jesus to proclaim the Gospel in India. Some of the authors or historians wrote that there were many Jews people lived here in India.

1.1.5 Interaction between Local Rulers and Religious Communities

Before the arrival of the Europeans the Thiruvananthapuram was ruled by the Venad dynasty⁴⁹. And this dynasty was succeeded the ancient Tamil Cheras⁵⁰. During this period many kinds of religious traditions flourished. And the political system of the Trivandrum was defined by the dynamic interaction between state power and the religious organisations in addition to the monarchical authority. Throughout this period several religious communities of the Trivandrum lived together mainly Hindu and early Christians, Muslim, Jain and Buddhist etc. Each of the religions had various interaction with the local authorities.

Here we would like to show how the native rulers of the Trivandrum handled religious diversity before the arrival of the Portuguese by thoroughly examining the relations. It shows how the religion and government were inseparable in the political imagination of the precolonial Kerala by analysing the patronage, conflict and cooperation. Realizing this background is crucial in order to recognize the long history of religious coexistence in southern India as well as to understand the region's past.

1.1.6 Relationship between local rulers and religious groups.

As an important aspect of their political legitimacy, the local rulers particularly those of the Venad Kingdom, which arose from the declining Chera dominance in the

⁴⁸Pallath Paul, “*The Catholic Church In India*” 27.

⁴⁹ Venad was the Kingdom in between Western Ghat (Mountains of the India). The capital city of the Venad was the Quilon. And it was one of the major principalities of Kerala.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venad_kingdom

⁵⁰ The Chera dynasty is also known as the Keralaputra, who speak Tamil language. They ruled the over parts of the Kerala and Tamilnadu. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chera_dynasty

area frequently encouraged the Hindu temple culture. In addition to being places of worship, temples served as educational institution employers, landowners and the social and economic entities. The Venad Kings encouraged to build temple Padmanabhaswamy in Trivandrum, which became the centrality of the royal ideology of the Trivandrum. The rulers strengthened their position as dharmic kings who maintained cosmic and social order (dharma) through the religious patronage by giving the land of the temples (devadānam) and the tax exemption.⁵¹

According to the historical and the archeological data, Kerala, including the portion of Trivandrum, was formerly heavily influenced by the Buddhism and Jainism. Due to the increasing influence of Brahmanical Hinduism, many of these societies had either declined or been incorporated by the early medieval period. The royal support of the Hindu orthodoxy made it easier for some Buddhist and Jain sanctuaries to be transformed into Hindu temples.⁵²

The St. Thomas Christians also lived in the Malabar Coast and they had a good communication with the Kingdom. These Christians were important because they worked as traders, scribes and tax collectors and the local rulers has taken good attitude toward the Christians.⁵³

The kings' responsibilities also included handling disputes and exchanges between different religions. Although widespread acts of religious violence were uncommon, conflicts did occur, particularly in relation to land rights or temple privileges. In these conflicts, the rulers served as arbitrators and frequently supported the prevailing religious organizations. But they were also practical, making sure that religious minority who made administrative or financial contributions were safeguarded in order to preserve political stability and social harmony.⁵⁴

The link between the royal court and religious organizations was mediated by the Nair nobility, who frequently functioned as the monarchs' military and administrative elites. The connection of religion and governance was further reinforced by their support of temples, which included gifts and the maintenance of temple ceremonies. At the court,

⁵¹ M.G.S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, Kerala Historical Society, 1972, p. 45.

⁵² Kesavan Veluthat, *The Early Medieval in South India*, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 101–103.

⁵³ István Perczel, “The Saint Thomas Christians and the Indian Ocean,” in *Eastern Christianity and the Cold War, 1945–91*, Routledge, 2010, pp. 25–30.

⁵⁴ K.K.N. Kurup, *History of Christianity in Kerala*, Mittal Publications, 1994, pp. 19–22.

the Brahmins, especially the Nambudiris, were powerful figures who advised kings on religious issues and validated their reign through rites like royal consecration (raja abhisheka).⁵⁵ A deep relationship was created within the monarchy, temple and the cast settling hierarchies which defined the social order of the time.

Most of the royal support was given to the Hindu temple institutions as the representations of societal stability and the divine monarchy. While the Christians and the remaining members of Buddhist and Jain sects were either tolerated or assimilated due to political and economic factors. In addition to spiritual motivations, the monarchs' actions were influenced by a strategic view of religion as a weapon for unity, government, and the legitimacy of authority.

1.1.7 Patronage and Tolerance of Religious Diversity

Royal support was an important element for the relations of the local rulers with the religious communities. Social structures and the practices of the religion were reinforced by the royalty and kings who were supporting the Brahmin priestly elite, gave temples grants and planned grand celebrations. Devadāna or land grants, to Hindu temples were typical as they guaranteed the allegiance of the kings and the spiritual merits.⁵⁶

But the rulers' involvement extended beyond the Hindu establishments. As we have seen, there is proof that the southern Kerala, including the areas close to the Trivandrum, were home to the Christian communities, particularly those who associated with the tradition of the St. Thomas Christian.⁵⁷ Even having fewer in number than Hindus, Christian communities were valued for their devotion and mercantile abilities. Since their commercial efforts connected Kerala with West Asia and other regions of the Indian Ocean network, local rulers frequently gave them unique rights in commerce and property ownership.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, National Book Stall, 1970, pp. 214–219.

⁵⁶ Kesavan Veluthat, *The Early Medieval in South India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 155–157.

⁵⁷ George Menachery, *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, Vol. 2 (Trichur: 1973), 34–36.

⁵⁸ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 15.

In the 8th century the Muslims traders, mostly Arabs started establishing themselves along the Malabar Coast and were protected by the monarchy. As part of the larger attempts to improve regional trade, the royalty supported their activities, even though their presence in Trivandrum especially was less important than in northern Kerala port like Calicut.⁵⁹

Due to the practical considerations, the Venad rulers have shown a significant level of religious tolerance. The religious diversity not only welcomed in a culture that was closely linked to trade, diplomacy and academic. But, at the same time, they were tolerated. In the 10th century Jainism and Buddhism had left behind enduring cultural impacts that could be seen in the art, architecture and even some ritual activities of the temples⁶⁰.

There is a Buddhist root in the architectural and the ritual features of the many Hindu temples in the southern Kerala, which show a continuity in religious activity rather than the sudden changes. For example, non-Vedic customs that were incorporated into Hindu practice which may be seen in some festivals and images associated with snake worships (naga cults)⁶¹.

In Kerala, the Jewish people, which was mostly concentrated in Cranganore (Kodungallur), also kept up a relationship with the leaders of the state. Although there is few concrete proofs of Jews being in Trivandrum before to 1500, their presence in the surrounding districts support the reputation of Kerala as a religious diverse state.⁶²

Because of the tolerance, conflicts did arise, frequently over the trade privileges, temple managements and the lands. For example, the royal involvement was occasionally necessary to resolve conflicts between Brahmin landowners and non-Brahmin groups, such as early Christians and other castes. Instead of favouring one religious group over another, royalty served as mediators, working to uphold social order.⁶³

In addition, the competition for resources occasionally caused tension between various religious communities. In any case, to maintain the stability and the prosperity of

⁵⁹ K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 61.

⁶⁰ Ayyar L.K., *The Anthropology of the Syrian Christians* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1999), 21.

⁶¹ M.G.S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, 48–50.

⁶² Nathan Katz, *Who Are the Jews of India?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 46.

⁶³ M.T. Narayanan, *Religion and Society in South India* (Trivandrum: University of Kerala, 2002), 105.

the kingdom, kings typically attempted to use practical governance to strike a balance between conflicts interests.

1.1.8 Cultural and Economic Context

Before the arrival of the Portuguese people, the southern coastal region of India, including Trivandrum was already a prospering hubs of cultural exchange and trade. A vital part of the Indian Ocean commerce network that linked India with Arabia, Persia, East Africa and southeast Asia, Trivandrum is situated on the southwest coast of the Indian subcontinent. The social identities, religious and the linguistics of the region were influenced by the trade of Spice and the resulting cultural contacts. The pre-Portuguese religious and economic landscape of the Trivandrum was thus shaped by the trade of the Spice, the cultural exchange and the early interaction with Arab traders and their influence.

1.1.8.1 Role of the Spice Trade and Cultural Exchanges in Shaping Religious Practices

The Malabar Coast economy focused largely on the Spice trade and the Trivandrum was an important hub in this system of the commerce. The inland forest of Kerala was rich in black pepper, Cardamom, turmeric and ginger commodities that were in high demand in the Persian, Roman and the Arab markets.⁶⁴

The ancient ports of Malabar were very famous worldwide. These ports made easy the trade of spices and other goods. Malabar had three famous ports named: Cranganore, which is formerly known as Mahodayapuram or (Vanchi/ Muziris/ Kodungallur/ Tyndis); then Berkarai (Baraka/Varkala?) and Nelcynda (Nirkunnam). And these were the principal ports of the time. Thus, Malabar was the centre of the spices production for the world markets.’’⁶⁵

The classical Greco-Roman traditions identified Kerala as the origin of pepper and pearls, a description that endured into the medieval Islamic era.⁶⁶ The Malabar Coast was cited by Arab geographers and travellers such as Al-Masudi (10th century), Al-Idrisi

⁶⁴ K.M. Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1929), 12–15.

⁶⁵ Ben James Maliakal, *The Origin and Spread of Christianity in Malabar (Kerala): Scenario prior to the European advent (1498 AD)*, 14.

⁶⁶ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Book VI, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), 75.

(12th century) and Ibn Battuta (14th century) as a fertile area that produced valuable stones and spices.⁶⁷ Although they often mentioned Calicut, which generally referred to the Balad-al-Muluk (Land of the Kings), which encompassed southern state like Venad, the forerunner of the kingdom of Travancore.

Local rulers like early Venad kings were able to exercise autonomy and serve as patrons of temple construction, cultural endeavours and interregional diplomacy due to the wealth gained from the Spice trade.⁶⁸ The trade privileges granted to merchant guilds like the Manigramam⁶⁹ and Anjuvannam⁷⁰ which are attested by temple inscriptions and copper plate awards from the era.⁷¹ The involvement of both foreign and domestic merchants, occasionally of various religious backgrounds, in these guilds illustrates the society's diverse and economically integrated character.

Goods were never the only aspect of trade in the Indian Ocean. Ivory and the black pepper were accompanied by the social traditions, creative forms, architectural influences and cultural and religious concepts. Due to the proximity of the Trivandrum to the shore, foreign traders were frequent residents rather than occasional tourists. In the 8th century the Arabs and Persian started to establish in the localized villages along the Coast of the Malabar.⁷² Due to the traders especially the Arab traders, the Malayalam (Mother tongue of Kerala) adopted some Arabic word, especially in the domains of social norms, trade and navigation. For example: bismi (from Arabic bismillah), kappal (ship) and labba (clerk).⁷³ These interchanges also reflected in the food culture; for example, the Muslim communities' usages of dates, dried lemons and the usages or mixtures of the spices, which shows the influence of the middle eastern.⁷⁴ These pattern indicates profound and long-term integration rather than the merely brief interactions.

⁶⁷ Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone, *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa* (London: National Geographic Books, 2005), 102.

⁶⁸ M.G.S. Narayanan, *Perumāls of Kerala* (Calicut: CosmoBooks, 2013), 214.

⁶⁹ Manigramam is the medieval merchant guild which is organized by the Indian traders especially the southern India of the itinerant ethnic. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manigramam>

⁷⁰ The Anjuvannam also the medieval merchant guild, consisting to the non-Indian traders principally to the Arab and Persian. It is also done in the southern part of India. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anjuvannam>

⁷¹ Kesavan Veluthat, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993), 88–90.

⁷² Roland E. Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala* (Madras: Orient Longman, 1992), 36–39.

⁷³ S. N. Sadasivan, *A Social History of India* (New Delhi: APH Publishing, 2000), 401.

⁷⁴ K.K. Kusuman, *A History of Trade and Commerce in Kerala* (Trivandrum: University of Kerala, 1973), 91–93.

The contact among the communities often led to hybrid religious practices and the mutual influence. For instance, some academic suggest that Hindu temple celebrations absorbed organizational features from Muslim religious gatherings, such as choreographed procession, use of banners and the communal feasting.⁷⁵

1.1.8.2 Early Interaction with Arab Traders and their Influence on Local Communities

In the early Islamic era, Arabs had contact with the Kerala Coast. A group of Arab traders built the first mosque in India, according to Islamic traditions, in Kerala during the time of the prophet Muhammad.⁷⁶ Trivandrum is the close to the port of the Kollam and Vizhinjam, which were the important hubs for Arab trade, it is likely that early Muslim migrants would also have settled there.

Arab traders arrived as business partners rather than as invaders or colonists. Arab Muslim traders adapted into the society while preserving their unique religious identities through marriage to local women, the founding of the religious organizations and involvement in the political and social life.⁷⁷

As a result the Mappila people of Kerala, who were descended from Arab traders and native women, kept their Arabic names, their Islamic customs and some aspects of their middle eastern clothes and food.⁷⁸ The main activity of the Muslim people were trading and made contribution to the religious life and education. The scholars of the Arabia or Persia founded and operated the small Madrassas or institution for the religious learning.⁷⁹

The significant religious and cultural diversity resulted from the presence of Islam, even though its influence was still concentrated in specific coastal areas. In the discussion with the Islams, the local Hindu group likewise modified and reaffirmed their

⁷⁵ R. Chamapakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization* (New Delhi: Orford University Press, 1996), 179-181.

⁷⁶ Zainuddin Makhdoom, *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin*, trans. S. Muhammad Hussain Nainar (Madras: University of Madras, 1942), 7.

⁷⁷ Stephen Dale, "Trade, Conversion and the Growth of Islam in Malabar," *Studia Islamica* 71 (1990): 155-175.

⁷⁸ Miller, *Mappila Muslims*, 41-45.

⁷⁹ Baily, *Saints, Goddess and Kings*, 36.

own customs. At this time the caste system became more rigid, rituals were defined and temple festivals became more elaborate.⁸⁰

The region was more accessible to the new ideas because of the presence of the Christian communities and the Arab-Muslims. The Trivandrum's social and religious environment was one of the harmony and adjustment. The permeable religious boundaries permitted cultural borrowing, shared places and reciprocal rituals.

The ability of the various religious organizations to engage in civic and commercial activities was the result of the plurality of the Trivandrum. The Kings of the place granted territory to Christian churches, Muslim mosques and the Hindu temple, which shows a mutual understanding of their special responsibility.⁸¹

The region's openness to different cultures, the continuing functions of the spice trade and the integrating presence of the Arab traders all contributed to Trivandrum's economic vibrancy, cultural diversity and the religious pluralism.

⁸⁰ Narayanan, *Perumāls of Kerala*, 227.

⁸¹ Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, 23–24.

Chapter 2

The Arrival of the Portuguese in India (1498–1600)

A Brief Chronology of the second chapter

- 1497–1498 Vasco da Gama's voyage to India; arrival in Calicut on May 20, 1498.
- 1500 Pedro Álvares Cabral reaches India and establishes early contact with the St. Thomas Christians.
- 1503 Construction of Fort Manuel at Cochin.
- 1505 Appointment of Francisco de Almeida as first Viceroy; formal creation of the Estado da Índia.
- 1509-1515 Governorship of Afonso de Albuquerque; conquest of Goa (1510).
- 1514 Papal Bull *Pro excellenti praeeminentia* by Pope Leo X, confirming the *Padroado Régio*.
- 1519 Portuguese establish a trading post in Quilon (near Trivandrum).
- 1533 Creation of the Diocese of Goa.
- 1542 Arrival of St. Francis Xavier in India.
- 1560 Establishment of the Goa Inquisition
- 1599 Synod of Diamper held under Archbishop Alexis de Menezes.
- 1600 Consolidation of Latin Catholic communities along the Trivandrum coast

After the ten months of travelling by boat, Vasco da Gama reached Calicut on May 20, 1498. There were 25 small kingdoms in the Malabar coast and Calicut was one of the main ones. He finished his journey after a long search for a sea route to India. The King of Portugal had told Vasco da Game to find the Christians along the way.⁸²

⁸²Ben James Maliakal, *The Origin and Spread of Christianity in Malabar (Kerala): Scenario prior to the European advent (1498 AD)*, 72.

Vasco da Gama was dissatisfied with the Zamorin's cold reception in Calicut and initially avoided interacting with the local Christians. But the Portuguese developed a strong relationship with these early Christian groups after Pedro Álvares Cabral developed good contacts with the St. Thomas Christians around 1500. Franciscans and secular priests were among the Portuguese missionaries who attempted to interact with the Syrians, who were the family members of the people who were converted by the apostle Thomas. It quickly became evident that an episcopal oversight was required. The Grand Prior of the Order of Christ was given full ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the East by Pope Callixtus III in 1455. Pope Sixtus IV reaffirmed this privilege in 1487. In 1514, Pope Leo X gave this power to the Vicar of Thomar, and soon after, to the Bishop of Funchal, whose jurisdiction at that time included the whole East. This arrangement was formally established by the papal decree *Pro excellenti praeeminentia* of June 12, 1514, which placed all *Padroado Régio*⁸³ missions which including those in India under the jurisdiction of the Funchal until the establishment of the See of Goa in 1533.⁸⁴

Pope Alexander VI granted King Emmanuel of Portugal's request to designate an Apostolic Commissary in 1500. This was approved by the Pope on March 26, 1500. But the King did not use this ability right away. The first Apostolic Commissary to arrive in India was Don Gaspar (or Duarte) Nunes, a Dominican and the titular Bishop of Laodicea, who did not arrive until approximately 1515.⁸⁵

2.1 Exploration and Expansion: Portuguese Arrival in India (1498-1600)

The Portuguese arrived in India around the end of the 15th century, bringing in a new period in the history of the Indian Ocean world. When Vasco da Gama arrived in Calicut in 1498, he did not only established a direct maritime route between Europe and Asia but also established foundations for a century of major changes in the religious, political, and economic dynamics of India's southwestern coast. This encounter was

⁸³ The Padroado (from the Portuguese Padroado Real) was a royal patronage system in which the Holy See allowed the kings of Portugal the authority and responsibility to organise, support, and monitor missionary and ecclesiastical activity in overseas regions found by the Portuguese Crown. In return, the Crown was given responsibility for building churches, keeping clergy, and encouraging the spread of Christianity throughout its territories. This arrangement represented a unique collaboration between the Portuguese government and the Papacy in Church governance in colonial regions, particularly Asia and Africa.

⁸⁴ Ben James Maliakal, *The Origin and Spread of Christianity in Malabar (Kerala): Scenario prior to the European advent (1498 AD)*, 73.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 73-74.

motivated by several goals: the pursuit of the spice trade, the development of Portuguese imperial dominance, and the spread of Christianity through the *Padroado Régio* (Royal Patronage). The objectives were not pursued in isolation, but rather closely associated with the expansion of the Latin Catholic Church in areas such as Trivandrum profoundly embedded in the greater Portuguese imperial plans.⁸⁶

The foundation of Portuguese expansion in the East implied the creation of fortified commercial posts and political relationships with coastal nations. Initial interactions with powerful monarchs, such as the Zamorin of Calicut, were marked with diplomacy and conflict as the Portuguese sought to replace Arab merchants who had long dominated the spice trade.⁸⁷ The Malabar Coast, which is rich in black pepper and strategically, placed became a contentious area where business competition and cultural imposition conflicted. Despite some opposition, the Portuguese progressively established themselves by building forts, obtaining trade monopolies, and solidifying their influence through missionary activities and military force.⁸⁸

To govern and protect their expanding interests, the Portuguese Crown instituted the *Estado da Índia*, a centralized colonial administration with its headquarters in Goa. This apparatus served as both a political and ecclesiastical instrument of imperial control. Key figures like Afonso de Albuquerque (1453-1515) were instrumental in shaping this structure, combining naval strength, strategic marriages, and calculated alliances to consolidate Portuguese dominance.⁸⁹ Through this arrangement, the Crown not only maintained commercial dominance, but also allowed the Church to build dioceses, dispatch missionaries, and regulate ecclesiastical life across the Indian Ocean. The architecture of colonial rule enabled the Church's expansion.

The economic impact of Portugal's presence in India was far-reaching. Lisbon became a spice trading hub, and Indian ports were reorganised to better serve European commercial interests.⁹⁰ This reorientation of trade patterns also aided the spread of European cultural practices, technologies, and religious concepts across Indian

⁸⁶ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History* (London: Longman, 1993)15.

⁸⁷ K. M. Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese* (Bombay: Hind Kitabs Ltd., 1929), 45–47.

⁸⁸ M. N. Pearson, *The Portuguese in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 33.

⁸⁹ C. R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415–1825* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), 56–59.

⁹⁰ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History*, (London: Longman, 1993), 89.

civilisation. Missionaries introduced Latin liturgical styles, European-style church construction, and educational institutions to catechise indigenous inhabitants in both the coastal cities and rural areas.⁹¹ For regions like Trivandrum, this created a layered cultural reality where indigenous traditions coexisted, clashed, or were transformed under the influence of Portuguese Catholicism.

Trivandrum's religious landscape, which was already diverse prior to the Portuguese conquest, reacted to these changes in a variety of ways. For political and economic reasons, several local leaders and communities welcomed the Portuguese, creating opportunities for missionary work. Others, however, opposed the dissolution of their established hierarchies and beliefs.⁹² During this period the growth of the church must therefore be viewed not merely as the outcome of missionary zeal but as the result of a confluence of trade, diplomacy, coercion, and the cultural negotiation.

2.2 Early Portuguese Exploration

At the end of the 15th century the Portuguese arrival in Calicut, India represented a turning point not only in global navigation and commerce but also in the religious transformation of the coastal part of the south India.

2.2.1 Vasco da Gama's landing in Calicut (1498).

A long Portuguese search for a sea route to the East culminated in Vasco da Gama's first journey to India. Vasco da Gama travelled along the East African coast after leaving Lisbon in July 1497, around the Cape of Good Hope, and reached Calicut (present-day Kozhikode) on the Malabar Coast on May 20th, 1498.⁹³ India's religious, political, and economic landscapes were profoundly impacted by this journey. Trade between India and the West has been dominated for centuries by Arab and Persian traders. This commercial predominance was directly challenged by Vasco da Gama's entrance, which also brought Catholic Europe as a newcomer to the Indian Ocean globe.

⁹¹ Teotonio R. de Souza, *Medieval Goa: A Socio-Economic History* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 1979), 123–127.

⁹² Délio de Mendonça, *Conversions and Citizenry: Goa under Portugal 1510–1610* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 2002), 98.

⁹³ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–5.

Vasco da Gama came to Calicut, an expanding, international commerce hub governed by the Hindu Zamorin. A new era of Indo-European interactions began with Da Gama's landing, even though early negotiations between the Portuguese and local rulers were marred by miscommunications and mistrust.⁹⁴ While his expedition did not immediately result in profitable trade, it did establish a navigable route and strategic interest along India's western coast, including areas further south such as Cochin and Trivandrum. Portuguese influence would eventually spread to these territories, bringing not only commerce and soldiers, but also missionaries and ecclesiastical administrators.

2.2.2 The objectives of Portuguese exploration: trade, Christianity, and expansion.

Portuguese exploration throughout the Age of Discoveries was motivated by a combination of economic ambition, religious devotion, and imperial goals. These three goals trade, Christianity, and expansion - were pursued together and often reinforced one another. They did not come as neutral explorers; they arrived with a clear triad of goals: to dominate the trade of spice, to convert people to Catholicism and to establish a political and imperial presence. These objectives were pursued in tandem and found fertile ground in the diverse and pluralistic religious environment of regions like Trivandrum.

Trade

Portugal's principal purpose in India was to gain direct access to the lucrative spice trade. By the late mediaeval period, Europe's demand for black pepper, cinnamon, cardamom, and other spices had increased, yet Arab traders and Venetian merchants dominated those routes.⁹⁵ The Portuguese intended to bypass these intermediaries by establishing a marine monopoly at the source. Calicut was an obvious target given its important role in the spice trade, but other ports around the Malabar Coast, especially those near Trivandrum, were also pulled into the Portuguese trading network.

Commercial operations required the construction of fortified trading posts (feitorias), sea patrols, and diplomatic contacts. These early efforts established the logistical foundation for Portuguese presence along the coast. Though Trivandrum was

⁹⁴ K.M. Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1960), 12-15.

⁹⁵ Anthony Disney, *Twilight of the Pepper Empire: Portuguese Trade in Southwest India in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 22-25.

not an early trading centre like Calicut or Cochin, its proximity to the spice-producing interior and maritime location meant that it quickly fell under Portuguese influence.⁹⁶ Economic infrastructure frequently came before church constructions, but the two would eventually converge as the Portuguese Crown regarded commerce as an instrument for spiritual conquest.

Christianity

Along with business reasons, Portuguese exploration had a strong religious component. From the beginning, the Crown saw its overseas development as part of a Christian mission to evangelise non-Europeans. The *Padroado Régio* (Royal Patronage) conferred by succeeding popes empowered the Portuguese monarchs to oversee missionary efforts in the East.⁹⁷ It included the building churches, ensuring the conversion of the local population and the appointing of the clergy.

The Portuguese aimed to spread Latin Christianity into new regions, particularly in locations where Eastern Christian populations already existed. In areas like Trivandrum, where Syrian Christians had long been linked to the Church of the East, the Portuguese pushed a Latin ecclesiastical organisation. They tried to put all Christians under the Pope's authority, frequently using coercion, persuasion, and incentives.⁹⁸ There were missionaries from the Franciscan and Jesuit orders who accompanied traders and military officials, working to plant a Catholic network and organize catechetical activity. Therefore, the evangelization became both a spiritual mission and a tool to consolidate the Portuguese authority.

Expansion

In 1505, the Portuguese established the *Estado da Índia*, which formalised their rule in Asia. The appointment of viceroys and governors, the construction of fortifications and the creation of naval dominance enabled Portugal to project influence far beyond its

⁹⁶ Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India, 1500–1663* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), 49-52.

⁹⁷ Charles Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415–1825* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), 103-106.

⁹⁸ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 215–218.

metropolitan borders. This imperial infrastructure enabled the continued presence of missionaries and the formation of ecclesiastical hierarchy.⁹⁹

The spread of religion and imperial expansion were closely related. The Latin Catholic Church frequently expanded after alliance-building or armed conquest. Local leaders who collaborated with the Portuguese occasionally benefited politically or financially in return for permitting missionary work. This pattern would soon emerge in Trivandrum and the neighbouring areas: religious missions came after economic penetration, and both were maintained by the Estado da Índia's military and administrative branch.

2.3 Portuguese Encounters with Indian Coastal Kingdoms

The arrival of the Portuguese to the south part of India in 1498 marked a beginning of a new chapter in the commercial, political and the religious history of the region. The landing of the Vasco da Gama introduced the maritime power of the Europe to the Indian ocean trade system and the Portuguese into contact and often conflict with coastal kingdoms such as the Raja of Cochin, Travancore rulers at Trivandrum and the Zamorin of Calicut. These kinds of interactions were the foundation of the establishment and spread of the Latin Catholic church in Trivandrum. The Portuguese strategy, supported by the *Padroado Régio*, the royal sponsorship system that connected missionary activities with the Crown's objectives, combined religious zeal, military forces and diplomacy. The Portuguese were able to establish forts, trading posts, and ecclesiastical facilities as a result of these coastal conflicts, which served both imperial and evangelising functions.¹⁰⁰

As we already mentioned, missionaries from the Franciscans, Jesuits, and other religious organisations followed Portuguese fleets and gained access to royal courts and communities. Their entrance, however, was not into a spiritual void. Trivandrum's religious landscape was diversified, with thriving Hindu traditions, long-standing Syrian Christian groups, and a Muslim presence formed by centuries of Arab trade.¹⁰¹ Portuguese relationships with certain local rulers, such as the Raja of Cochin, enabled them to

⁹⁹ Teotonio R. de Souza, *Medieval Goa: A Socio-Economic History* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 1979), 60–65.

¹⁰⁰ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History*, (London: Longman, 1993), 35–37.

¹⁰¹ Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India, 1500–1663* (Manohar, 2001), 121–125.

challenge more strong rulers like the Zamorin, leading to religious and political opportunities. The atmosphere of tension and transformation gave fertile ground for Latin Christianity to grow, albeit unevenly.

Negotiation and resistance were common features of these meetings. While some local elites and communities saw benefits in conversion, including as protection, trade access, and political support, others thoroughly protected their religious and cultural freedoms.¹⁰²

2.3.1 Relations with rulers like the Zamorins of Calicut

When Vasco da Gama arrived at Calicut, the Portuguese attempted to negotiate a treaty with the Zamorins in order to acquire access to the lucrative spice trade. While the Zamorin first welcomed them with interest, the parties' mutual suspicion steadily grew. The Zamorin court had long-standing economic connections with Arab and Muslim merchants, who were viewed as competitors by the Portuguese.¹⁰³ This rivalry fostered strong distrust, particularly because the Portuguese claimed exclusivity in the pepper trade and employed aggressive techniques to achieve financial advantages.

Tensions between the Zamorins and the Portuguese quickly escalated into open combat. After Pedro Álvares Cabral's voyage in 1500 destroyed a Portuguese factory in Calicut and killed many Portuguese, retaliatory attacks occurred. The Portuguese bombarded Calicut and the naval battles had become the frequent.¹⁰⁴ All these hostilities underlined a fundamental aspect of the Portuguese colonial strategy: military intimidation paired with economic and missionary objectives. While the Zamorin posed a substantial challenge to Portuguese control, his resistance prompted the Portuguese to seek partnerships with competing coastal kings.

One such rival was the Raja of Cochin, who was a minor king and was threatened by the power of Zamorins. The Portuguese took advantage of this tension by joining forces with Cochin, giving military assistance in exchange for economic concessions and

¹⁰² Francis Robinson, "Strategies of Muslim Religious and Political Leaders," in *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Religions*, ed. John Bowker (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 218.

¹⁰³ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History 2nd ed.* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 43–45.

¹⁰⁴ K.M. Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1960), 22–25.

permission to construct fortresses and churches.¹⁰⁵ This early collaboration established the groundwork for a larger Portuguese strategy: dismantle the Malabar Coast's governmental unity and involve themselves in local rivalries. Despite their failure to conquer Calicut for much of the 16th century, the Portuguese were influenced to relocate their economic and ecclesiastical efforts to the south part of the Kerala which closer to the areas such as Trivandrum.

2.3.2 Establishment of trading posts and fortifications along the Malabar coast

The continuous conflict with the Zamorin compelled the Portuguese to reconsider their coastal strategy. From 1503, they began building fortified trading posts *feitorias* in friendly or strategically important coastal cities. These were Cochin (1503), Cannanore (1505), Quilon (1519), and subsequently locations further south. These stations were more than just commerce hubs, but they were also military bases and missionary centres.¹⁰⁶

The Cochin became the first stronghold of Portuguese in India. The construction of Fort Manuel and the establishment of a Franciscan church signalled the beginning of a strong relationship between Portuguese military presence and Latin Church expansion.¹⁰⁷ They defended Portuguese merchants and missionaries from rival forces, particularly the Zamorin and Arab traders, and helped to project Portuguese authority throughout the region.

The Portuguese policy of combining fortifications with missionary activity spread to other coastal settlements, such as Quilon, which was closer to Trivandrum. Quilon's strategic location on the spice trade, as well as its proximity to Christian populations, made it a hub for Portuguese religious interests. Following the military buildup, churches, seminaries, and chapels were built, reflecting the colonial tradition of religious implantation through force and royal support (*Padroado Régio*).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Teotonio R. de Souza, *Medieval Goa: A Socio-Economic History* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 1979), 33-35.

¹⁰⁶ George Menachery, ed., *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, Vol. II (Trichur: The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India, 1973), 312.

¹⁰⁷ D. Dennis Hudson, "Religious Change in South India (1500–1800)," in *A Companion to Global Catholicism*, ed. Catherine O'Donnell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022), 120-122.

¹⁰⁸ Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 94.

These fortified enclaves allowed missionaries, notably Franciscans, Dominicans, and subsequently Jesuits, to operate with greater freedom and protection. They became centres of Latin ecclesiastical influence, gradually spreading into the hinterlands. While the Portuguese had a limited presence in Trivandrum compared to Cochin or Quilon, the network of fortified posts along the coast allowed for indirect religious influence and missionary penetration into the south part of the regions.

The creation of such positions had a significant impact on local economies and cultures. Portuguese trade strategies changed regular Arab-controlled networks, reshaped local alliances, and established new economic hierarchies. In these shifting dynamics, conversion to Latin Christianity was frequently associated with economic or political gains, particularly for local elites seeking favour with Portuguese authorities.¹⁰⁹

Therefore, the Portuguese construction of fortifications and trading posts along the Malabar Coast was not just a business tactic; it was rather a geopolitical and ecclesiastical endeavour that profoundly influenced the religious and cultural landscapes of areas such as Trivandrum in the 16th century.

2.4 The Role of the *Estado da Índia*:

The church's missionary initiatives were sustained by the institutional, logistical and the doctrinal framework established by the *Estado da Índia*, a centralised military and administrative infrastructure for the Portuguese colonies in Asia. In addition to enforcing royal authority, the *Estado* supported religious activities, combining colonial rule with the evangelisation of native peoples.

Apart from being a political organisation, the *Estado da Índia* played a significant role in determining the religious future of southern India. Its military facilities, centralised government, and the *Padroado Régio* allowed the Latin Catholic Church to establish itself in places like Trivandrum. The synergy between the cross and the crown was personified by individuals like Afonso de Albuquerque, who used both force and diplomacy to increase Portuguese power and establish a new religious institution. Even though it was

¹⁰⁹ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History* (London: Longman, 1993), 66–67.

frequently presented as a spiritual mission, the Church's growth was intrinsically linked to the Estado da *Índia's* imperial plans.

2.4.1 Administrative and military structure of Portuguese territories.

Francisco de Almeida became the first Viceroy of Portuguese India in 1505, marking the official beginning of the Estado da *Índia*. As the Portuguese Crown attempted to exercise authority over its expanding network of trading ports, fortifications, and settlements throughout the Indian Ocean basin, this action represented the beginning of the formal administrative framework in the East.¹¹⁰

The governor or viceroy, acted as the representative of the king and broad authority over the matters of the civil, the military and the church matters. He has received the support from the council and the other authorities such as fortress captains, feitores who oversaw trade, and ombudsmen who were in charge of justice.¹¹¹ This centralised administrative machinery was essential for maintaining law and order, managing trade, and assisting with missionary endeavours.

The relation between the *Estado da Índia* and religious organisations through the *Padroado Régio*, or Royal Patronage system, was one of its most important characteristics. This arrangement, which was approved by papal bulls like *Eximiae Devotionis* (1514) and *Inter Caetera* (1493), gave the Portuguese Crown broad authority to plan and finance Church missions in its foreign domains.¹¹² It was included to build churches, right to nominates the bishops and the collecting of tithes and turning the Portuguese state into a de facto ecclesiastical authority in all its colonies.

This was equally important to the Estado's military infrastructure. Along the Indian coastline, a series of fortified cities and trading ports served as bases for both military and commercial missions. These included Cochin, Quilon, and then Mylapore. The earliest churches and missionary facilities were in these locations as well,

¹¹⁰ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History* (London: Longman, 1993), 43.

¹¹¹ A.R. Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire, , Volume II: The Portuguese Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 116-118.

¹¹² Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 21.

demonstrating the mutually beneficial relationship between the religious propagations and the military rule.¹¹³

Even though Trivandrum and Travancore region were not under the direct control of the *Estado da Índia* and the Church was able to penetrate and function within the local people due to their closeness. Missionaries were frequently able to preach and settle through military missions, diplomatic agreements, and financial incentives.¹¹⁴ The *Estado da Índia* provided finance and protection for the Franciscan and Jesuit missions in particular, which used its infrastructure to increase their presence even in areas outside of direct Portuguese control.

2.4.2 Key figures such as Afonso de Albuquerque in consolidating Portuguese power.

Afonso de Albuquerque- Governor from 1509 to 1515- was one of the most important architects of the *Estado da Índia*. His administration was characterised by a number of significant conquests and policies that would change India's religious and cultural environment for several decades thereafter.

Albuquerque reached Goa in 1510 which made a turning point. Because of the diocesan institutions, religious organisations, and the seminaries for the priestly formations Goa developed into both the political and spiritual centre of Portuguese India.¹¹⁵ After that, they planned the catholic missions and dispatched to the other part of India, which included the Malabar coast the south part of the India and the southern kingdom. The Franciscans had already established their presence in Cochin and they have received more support from the administration of the Albuquerque.¹¹⁶

Also, Albuquerque envisioned a long-term Portuguese presence in Asia through cultural adaptation and racial integration. A Luso-Indian Christian community grew as a result of his encouragement of Portuguese settlers to marry women from India and this

¹¹³ C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415–1825* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), 102-104.

¹¹⁴ M.N. Pearson, *The Portuguese in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 49.

¹¹⁵ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 203.

¹¹⁶ A.M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India, Volume I: From the Beginning up to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century* (Bangalore: Church History Association of India, 1984), 337.

group played a crucial role in spreading Latin Catholic traditions.¹¹⁷ These type of policies were politically motivated and had long lasting ecclesiastical implications. Therefore, many of the mixed families became the participants and the patron in the local church.

Moreover, Albuquerque established strategic partnerships with regional leaders, such as the Raja of Cochin and the Zamorin of Calicut (at times), frequently providing military assistance in exchange for rights to build churches or send missionaries.¹¹⁸ Albuquerque's larger goal of developing friendly relationships with coastal kingdoms allowed missionaries to travel down the southwest coast with a fair amount of freedom, even though Trivandrum itself continued to be ruled by the indigenous people.

His actions also prepared the way for the Synod of Diamper (1599), which sought to establish Latin Catholic control over Kerala's historic Christian communities. Albuquerque had died decades earlier, but his combination of ecclesiastical support, political conflict, and military victory served as a model for succeeding governors and archbishops.¹¹⁹

Afonso de Albuquerque left behind a legacy of strategic integration: he made sure that the expansion of the church in areas like Trivandrum was not only feasible but also beneficial to the Crown by merging ecclesiastical growth with imperial authority.

2.5 Economic and Cultural Impact of the Portuguese in India

The arrival of the Portuguese changed some of the cultural and economic fabric of the Malabar coast. The main economic ambitions of the Portuguese were to make mission in India. But they also wanted to establish a fortified trade post and an ecclesiastical structure.

The Portuguese rapidly built a network of feitorias and forts to control important ports, motivated by the lucrative spice trade, especially that of pepper, cinnamon, and cardamom. Trivandrum was a part of the hinterland that supplied and interacted with important centres like Cochin and Quilon, although not being a central port in and of

¹¹⁷ Francisco Bethencourt, *The Inquisition: A Global History, 1478–1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 109.

¹¹⁸ Teotonio R. de Souza, *Medieval Goa: A Socio-Economic History* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1979), 92.

¹¹⁹ Angela Barreto Xavier, *Religion and Empire in Portuguese India: Conversion, Resistance, and the Making of Goa* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2015), 74–76.

itself. These trading networks produced economic prosperity that financed missionary work and made it easier to build churches. The historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam notes, “Commerce, conversion, and conquest formed a triad that defined Portuguese expansion in Asia.”¹²⁰ The Gospel followed the same routes as gold and spices, and the trade routes functioned as conduits for both spiritual and material goods.

The Portuguese culture had an equally profound impact. The existing cultural landscape was disrupted by the arrival of European artistic styles, new architectural forms, and Latin Catholic rituals. In order to set themselves apart from native sacred areas, churches constructed during this time, frequently with the support of Portuguese missionaries or administrators, incorporated Manueline and Renaissance elements. Furthermore, new forms of public religious expression were produced through processions, religious feasts, and the use of Western liturgical music. The missionaries like Jesuits, Franciscans and the Augustinians were made a development in the school of the catechetical, where taught not only the doctrines but also the music, customs and the European languages.¹²¹

However, this cultural influence was not always passively accepted by the local population. Many communities engaged with Portuguese culture through processes of resistance, adaptation, and cultural hybridisation. In certain contexts, conversion to Latin Christianity offered tangible social and economic advantages. These included partial relief from rigid caste hierarchies, access to new commercial networks associated with the Portuguese, and, in some cases, protection under Portuguese political and military authority.¹²² In other cases, tensions were sparked by the imposition of foreign customs. Cultural exchanges were frequently disputed, as evidenced by Syrian Christians' opposition to Latinization, particularly in light of the Synod of Diamper (1599).¹²³

¹²⁰ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History* (London: Longman, 1993), 5.

¹²¹ Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India, 1500–1663* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2001), 210.

¹²² Teotonio R. de Souza, *The Portuguese in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 132–135.

¹²³ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 216.

As Teotonio R. de Souza asserts, “Conversions were not merely spiritual transformations; they were negotiations of identity in a changing political and cultural landscape.”¹²⁴

The Portuguese trade monopoly bypassed Gujarati, Chinese, and Arab intermediaries, challenging established networks. It was centred in Cochin and reorganised coastal trade, indirectly affecting the hinterland of Trivandrum. This change boosted new groups, particularly Christian converts, while weakening the established mercantile classes.

The Crown was able to directly influence missionary plans and ecclesiastical appointments through the *Padroado Régio* system. The state provided financial support for missionaries under this system, and trade surpluses were used to support evangelisation.¹²⁵ The Church in Trivandrum was therefore never completely isolated from Portuguese political aspirations. Economic power became a crucial factor in the Church's expansion because of this close integration, but it also made Christianity more susceptible to being perceived as a colonial imposition than an indigenous spiritual path.

2.5.1 Spice trade, European goods, and the formation of new trading networks

Through the landing of Vasco da Gama in Calicut, started the new epoch in the economic landscape of the southern part of India. Portuguese colonial and religious aspirations were centred on the spice trade, which was the primary motivation of Portuguese marine exploration.

Sanjay Subrahmanyam notes that, “the Portuguese enterprise was an intricate blend of commercial interests and missionary zeal,” reflecting a convergence of empire building and religious evangelization.”¹²⁶

Trivandrum has given the direct access to the rich producing of the spice hinterland, cardamom, pepper, cinnamon and the high demand of the commodities

¹²⁴ Teotonio R. de Souza, *Medieval Goa: A Socio-Economic History* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 1979), 144.

¹²⁵ Délio de Mendonça, *Conversions and Citizenry: Goa under Portugal (1510–1610)* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 2002), 89.

¹²⁶ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500-1700: A Political and Economic History* (London: Longman, 1993), 45.

throughout Europe.¹²⁷ By developing fortified trading posts and forming new commercial relationships with regional leaders and merchant towns, the Portuguese took advantage of this geographic advantage. This technique promoted the development of intricate Indo-European trade networks that joined Indian spices and luxury commodities with European products like metalware, textiles, and weapons.¹²⁸ The combination of these markets for items created "a new economic order in the Indian Ocean, one that was distinctly Euro-Asian in character," emphasising the cultural and political aspects of business trade in addition to its transactional aspect.¹²⁹

The Portuguese monopoly on the spice trade supported missionary activities as a geopolitical and economic weapon. The money made from trade was used to support the founding of churches and missionary missions. By placing evangelisation under royal patronage, the Crown's "*Padroado Régio*" system formalised this connection and thus made church growth dependent on imperial expansion.¹³⁰ Missionaries have followed the trail of Portuguese soldiers and merchants, embedding Latin Catholicism within the socio-economic fabric of Trivandrum.

Francis Robinson states that, "the Portuguese were not merely conquerors of territory but cultivators of religious influence through economic hegemony."¹³¹

However, there was opposition to the establishment of these new networks. A vibrant and occasionally hostile economic environment resulted from local trading communities' resistance to Portuguese rule, especially Arab and Indian Muslim merchants who had long controlled the spice routes.¹³² Portuguese fortification and naval superiority in response further intertwined trade with religious and military conquest. Due to the emergence of new alliances and conflicts between indigenous tribes, European settlers, and missionary agents, the economic developments in Trivandrum subsequently led to profound social changes.

¹²⁷ Teotonio R. de Souza, *Portuguese in India: Studies in the History of the Portuguese in India* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 2004), 78.

¹²⁸ K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 112.

¹²⁹ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History* (London: Longman, 1993), 65.

¹³⁰ Francis Robinson, *The Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 1400–1668* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 94.

¹³¹ Robinson, *Portuguese Overseas Expansion*, 101.

¹³² Teotonio R. de Souza, *Portuguese in India*, 85.

European manufactured goods were also introduced during this time, establishing in markets among local elites and promoting cross-cultural interaction. Along with commodities, the Portuguese introduced new financial instruments and business methods that changed local mercantile customs.¹³³ In this sense, the economic effects of Portuguese involvement went beyond simple trade volumes and included local economy restructuring as well as the development of hybridised trading networks that established previously unknown connections between Europe and the Indian Ocean region.

2.5.2 The spread of European culture, technology, and religion

Some of the cultural changes emerged by the Portuguese presence in Trivandrum, many of which were mediated by missionary work and church growth. Religious organisations like the Franciscans and Jesuits made a determined attempt to import the European education, liturgical customs, and material culture as tools of religion and cultural hegemony during the 16th century. In this region of India, the Latin Catholic Church served as a medium for the spread of European architectural designs, artistic styles, and new technologies.

New liturgical tools and the construction of churches in the baroque style were examples of how European Christian identity was transplanted into the local surroundings. Portuguese influence could be seen in Trivandrum's early church architecture, which reflected the colonial encounter's aesthetic and ideological aspects.¹³⁴ These churches responded to the spiritual needs but also promoted the European norms and customs among converts and the local community by acting as centres for social reorganisation and cultural transmission. Cultural spread was supported by technological transfer. The Portuguese brought new military technologies, shipbuilding methods, and navigational devices that had greater impacts on regional dynamics of power.¹³⁵ By improving security and logistical support for ecclesiastical endeavours, such technical diffusion also improved missionary capacities and allowed Portuguese influence to become even more entrenched in coastal communities, especially in Trivandrum.

¹³³ K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization*, 117.

¹³⁴ Teotonio R. de Souza, *Art and Architecture of Portuguese India* (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1987), 130.

¹³⁵ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History* (London: Longman, 1993), 70.

A major factor in the cross-cultural interaction indeed religion. Missionaries attempted to force Roman ecclesiastical authority and Latin rites on the region's various Christian communities, particularly the Syrian Christians who followed Eastern rites. Under the leadership of Archbishop Alexis de Menezes, the Synod of Diamper (1599) played a crucial role in the consolidation of Portuguese ecclesiastical authority and the Latinization of native Christian customs.¹³⁶ By enforcing theological conformity and standardising liturgical customs, this synod successfully brought the local church closer to Rome.

However, as Teotonio de Souza observed, this process “triggered complex responses from local communities, ranging from acceptance and adaptation to resistance and resilience.”¹³⁷

In addition to religious ceremonies, the Portuguese brought Western academic disciplines, Latin literacy, and catechism to Europe. To produce a new Catholic elite that was knowledgeable about European languages and theology, mission center-affiliated schools were established. These educational initiatives were a part of a larger plan to strengthen cultural and religious influence and create devoted Christian communities that supported Portuguese colonial purposes.¹³⁸

Spreading European civilisation also required careful balancing with regional customs. Some Muslim and Hindu communities adopted Christianity for a number of reasons, such as social mobility, economic benefits, and political ties, while others saw the Latin Church as a foreign imposition. The resulting cultural synthesis demonstrated the dynamic and hybrid character of colonial cultural exchange by creating Christian practices that combined indigenous and European elements.¹³⁹

The Portuguese intertwined trade with colonial ambition by controlling the spice trade and creating new trading networks, which laid the material groundwork for missionary effort. At the same time, the region's religious and social fabric was altered by the spread of European culture, technology, and religion through colonial and ecclesiastical methods.

¹³⁶ Alexis de Menezes, *Synod of Diamper*, 1599.

¹³⁷ Teotonio R. de Souza, *Portuguese in India*, 110.

¹³⁸ Francis Robinson, *Portuguese Overseas Expansion*, 103.

¹³⁹ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia*, 85.

Chapter 3

Growth of the Latin Catholic Church in Trivandrum

3.1 Early Missionary Efforts in Trivandrum

The early missionaries had numerous difficulties including linguistic barriers, cultural unfamiliarity, and opposition from established religious traditions such as Hinduism, Islam, and Syrian Christianity. Nonetheless, Portuguese-backed missionaries frequently discovered opportunities for evangelisation among the lower castes and marginalised fishing communities, many of whom were economically poor and socially marginalised due to the rigid caste structure.¹⁴⁰

3.1.1 Arrival of Portuguese Missionaries

In the early 16th century, Portuguese missionaries arrived in Trivandrum, which changed the religious landscape of the area. After the landing of the Vasco da Gama in Calicut in 1498, the Portuguese Crown, influenced by a mixture of religious devotion and economic ambition, aimed to expand the Catholic faith's influence while simultaneously controlling the spice trade. There was an agreement between the Holy See and the Portuguese monarchy on the padroado system, which gave the latter the power to manage church affairs in the East, including the appointment of bishops and the distribution of missionaries to regions influenced by Portugal.¹⁴¹

The Franciscans and Dominicans were among the religious groups who sent the majority of the first group of missionaries to the area. These orders had started establishing some missions throughout the Malabar Coast by the 1530s, particularly in the region of present-day Trivandrum.¹⁴² The Jesuits, who would eventually play a dominating role, arrived slightly later but with significant institutional support and discipline. Francis Xavier, possibly Asia's most prominent Jesuit missionary, arrived in

¹⁴⁰ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 22–24.

¹⁴¹ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History* (London: Longman, 1993), 135.

¹⁴² M. A. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India, Vol. I: From the Beginning up to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century (up to 1542)* (Bangalore: Church History Association of India, 1984), 347–348.

Goa in 1542, and while his direct work were focused on other areas of the coastal areas and his methods and influence spread to the Trivandrum region.¹⁴³

3.1.2 Initial Evangelization Strategies

Portuguese missionaries' initial methods in Trivandrum represented a mix of pragmatic flexibility and ideological conservatism. One of the first and most effective approaches was to build churches and schools to form Christian communities. Missionaries soon recognised the value of infrastructure in establishing the presence of Latin Church. These churches were not only places of worship, but also educational, catechetical, and social welfare centres.¹⁴⁴

Portuguese evangelists emphasised the use of the vernacular in their catechetical work. Missionaries learnt Malayalam and Tamil to successfully connect with the all the people. Early catechisms and religious writings were translated into local languages with the assistance of indigenous converts.¹⁴⁵ However, they tried to translate the Latin theological frameworks but, it was not easy to make good conversations without the good language.

Another important approach was to deliberately target groups that were marginalised, particularly the Paravars¹⁴⁶ and Mukkuvars, coastal fishing families with little social mobility under the prevailing Hindu caste system.¹⁴⁷ Missionaries promised these communities not only eternal salvation, but also real benefits such as protection from local landlords, access to Portuguese markets, and support from colonial officials. This combination of evangelism and social upliftment was effective, resulting in huge conversions in particular coastal communities.

¹⁴³ Georg Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times, Vol. II: India, 1541–1545* (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1977), 143–150.

¹⁴⁴ Teotonio R. de Souza, *Medieval Goa: A Socio-Economic History* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 1979), 96.

¹⁴⁵ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 253.

¹⁴⁶ The word Paravas derived from the Paravai which means Sea were coastal residents who specialised in pearl diving, fishing, salt production, and boat building. They were perhaps related to the Paradavar of Sangam literature and lived in the Neithal coastal region. Professor Subramaniam characterises them as "ferocious warriors" who made up a significant portion of the Tamil fleet. Parathavar's name may alternatively be derived from the Tamil word padavar ("boatmen"). Another myth links their origin to Ayodhya and the Bharatas of the Mahabharata. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paravar>

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 254.

At the same time, the missionaries insisted on strictly adhering to Latin liturgical and theological practices. Traditional Indian customs, rituals, and social practices particularly those deemed incompatible with Christian orthodoxy which condemned and suppressed. This strategy occasionally alienated potential recruits and caused friction with existing Christian groups, notably among long-established Syrian Christians who maintained to Eastern liturgical traditions and opposed Latinization.¹⁴⁸

The missionaries also placed a high value on the sacraments, particularly baptism, Eucharist, and confession. Baptisms were frequently administered in large numbers following group catechism sessions. Converts were given new Christian names and were frequently expected to follow Portuguese costumes and traditions.¹⁴⁹ These apparent signs of change denoted both theological conversion and cultural realignment, strengthening the civilising mission professed by Portuguese ecclesiastical and political leaders.

Seminaries were created to train indigenous clergy in order to maintain continuity and sustainability. Although the reach of these organisations was still restricted in the 16th century, they signalled the start of an indigenous Latin Church that would grow over the ensuing centuries.¹⁵⁰ Being a pastoral requirement, the formation of a local clergy was a reaction to the geographical, health, and numerical difficulties that European missionaries faced.

3.2 Establishment of Latin Christian Communities

3.2.1 Formation of the First Latin Communities

The establishment of Latin Christian communities in Trivandrum in the 16th century was a historic event in the region's religious history. The arrival of Portuguese missionaries, particularly Franciscans, Dominicans, and Jesuits, emphasised the importance of establishing permanent ecclesial structures and communities of faith.

¹⁴⁸ A. Mathias Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India, Vol. II: From the Middle of the Sixteenth to End of the Seventeenth Century* (Bangalore: Church History Association of India, 1989), 112–113.

¹⁴⁹ Délio de Mendonça, *Conversions and Citizenry: Goa under Portugal 1510–1610* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 2002), 87.

¹⁵⁰ Benedict Vadakkekara, *Origin of Christianity in India: A Historiographical Critique* (Media House: Delhi, 2007), 204.

Evangelisation operations, which began in coastal regions of vital trade significance, quickly moved inland with the help of both Portuguese authorities and native converts.

When the Portuguese arrived a new ecclesiastical and the socio-cultural structure began to emerge. The Portuguese missionary effort, which was closely related to colonial development, resulted in the deliberate establishment of Latin Christian communities along coastal areas and in territories under Portuguese influence. The first Latin Catholic community in Trivandrum were usually founded near significant Portuguese trading posts and forts. These towns frequently included churches, schools, and other fundamental infrastructure needed to maintain a strong Christian identity. Initially made up of Portuguese settlers, the communities quickly incorporated local converts, many of whom came from the fishing castes, such as the Mukkuvar and Paravar communities, due to the Portuguese preference for coastal populations who were more accessible and reliant on colonial patronage.¹⁵¹

Some of the missionaries like the Franciscans and Jesuits, played an important role in organising these communities. The Franciscans were among the first to arrive, erecting modest chapels and catechism centres that eventually grew into parish institutions. The Jesuits, with their emphasis on education and cultural adaptability, expanded the ecclesiastical organisation by adding Latin sacraments, religious instruction, and a large clerical presence.¹⁵²

Pius Malekandathil explains that “The missionary activities of the Franciscans and Jesuits were not only about baptism but about building up a Christian social structure that aligned with Portuguese ecclesiastical ideals.”¹⁵³

Conversions were frequently supported by incentives such as protection from local rulers, food distribution during famines, employment within the Portuguese system, and access to education. These practical benefits made conversion appealing, particularly to lower caste people seeking socioeconomic mobility. However, it is necessary to highlight that

¹⁵¹ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History* (London: Longman, 1993), 114.

¹⁵² Antony Vallavanthara, *India in 1500 AD: The Jesuit Enterprise in the Malabar Coast* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2001), 8.

¹⁵³ Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India, 1500–1663* (Delhi: Manohar, 2001), 213.

this process was more than just utilitarian. Genuine spiritual encounters and the witness of missionary compassion motivated many people to believe and commit to their faith.¹⁵⁴

3.2.2 Key Local Figures and Their Roles in the Church's Expansion

While Portuguese missionaries were the main force behind Latin Catholic expansion, the success and sustainability of these communities were highly dependent on the cooperation of local leaders. Several indigenous leaders, catechists, and lay partners helped adapt and maintain the Latin faith within the local cultural context.

Don Antonio de Rozário, a convert from local nobility who served as a catechist and mediator between the missionaries and the local community, was one of the most important native collaborators. He assisted the missionaries in overcoming linguistic and cultural difficulties, translating catechetical materials into Tamil and Malayalam and organising local community events.¹⁵⁵ His contribution was important in spreading the faith throughout the Trivandrum coast, particularly among the Mukkuvar fishermen, who ultimately became the backbone of the Latin Catholic Church in the area.

And the local teachers and schoolmasters appointed by the Jesuits played an important role in spreading the faith. These lay leaders taught basic catechism classes, enforced church discipline, and frequently acted as the community's initial point of contact with clergy.

Father Pedro Luis, a Jesuit missionary stationed in the Travancore district in the late 16th century, had also a significant influence. He is said to have baptised over a thousand converts in the region, and his close relationship with the Tamil-speaking minority in Trivandrum helped set the groundwork for future missions.¹⁵⁶ His writings show love for local customs and a deliberate attempt to contextualise Christian ideas within Indian culture.

¹⁵⁴ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 219.

¹⁵⁵ Charles Borges, *The Economics of the Goa Jesuits, 1542–1759* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 1994), 97.

¹⁵⁶ Vallavanthara, *India in 1500 AD*, 95.

In one of them wrote that, “We do not destroy their customs but baptize their hearts, so they may follow Christ without abandoning their honor.”¹⁵⁷

Many women also served important contributions, though sometimes undocumented in official missionary records. Wives of catechists and converted noblewomen were in charge of propagating Christian ideas within family and local settings. Through family life and parenting, they contributed to the formation of a new Latin Catholic identity that merged local tradition with Christian practice.¹⁵⁸

Local monarchs and chieftains played an indirect role in the Church's expansion. Though not always supportive of conversion, many kings tolerated or even promoted missionary activities in exchange for Portuguese military or trade benefits. For example, the Raja of Quilon provided property for churches and missionary housing in Trivandrum's surrounding villages, which became Christian centres.¹⁵⁹

3.3 Role of Portuguese Colonial Power in Church Growth

The Estado da Índia, projected political and military power in the Trivandrum region (the southernmost portion of the Malabar littoral, anchored by ports like Quilon/Tangasseri and Vizhinjam) in ways that provided a chance and some challenges for the Catholic missions. This section examines how Portuguese political and military power shaped religious expansion opportunities and how the interactions between Portuguese officials and missionaries first Franciscans, then Jesuits starting in the 1540s facilitated, complicated, and occasionally influenced the spread of the Latin Catholic Church among local populations between 1500 and 1600. The statement made here is that Trivandrum's "growth" was not linear or exclusively spiritual, but rather mediated by fortifications, royal treaties, convoy systems, and patronage laws (*padroado*), which included mission into the empire's system.

3.3.1 Political and military influence on religious expansion

¹⁵⁷ Vallavanthara, *India in 1500 AD*, 92.

¹⁵⁸ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 45.

¹⁵⁹ K. M. Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1929), 134.

Treaties and fortifications quickly formalised the Portuguese presence on the southern Malabar coast. In 1503, the governing house sanctioned the establishment of a factory in Quilon (modern Kollam), starting off a long-term alliance that rooted Portuguese shipping and pepper procurement in the south.¹⁶⁰ Tangasseri (a beach area of Quilon) quickly gained strategic importance, and by the late 1510s, the crown had authorised fortification to protect both trade and people.¹⁶¹ During the 16th century, Tangasseri's Fort St Thomas served as the primary Portuguese authority, offering physical security, magazine storage, and a platform for clergy living and chapel-building. Its vestiges still stand today.¹⁶² These facilities did more than just safeguard merchants; they established a "sphere of security" inside which missionaries could catechise, have confraternities, and transit relatively freely along the coast.¹⁶³

Fortified space also showed symbolic value. Walls and bastions indicated the endurance of the Lusitanian alliance in a coastline challenged by the Venad/Travancore kingdom, the Zamorin of Calicut, and competing merchant interests. Architecture integrated theology into geography as churches arose inside or close to these forts; the stability of the *Estado* supported the stability of the ecclesial presence.¹⁶⁴

The annual *carreira* (the oceanic run) organised by the Portuguese crown and the provincial *armadas* that protected coastal traffic allowed for a missionary "itinerary" that connected Goa, Cochin, Quilon/Tangasseri, Cape Comorin, and the fishing communities that bordered Trivandrum.¹⁶⁵ In this context, the fortress at Tangasseri provided missionaries with a beginning for easy coastal approaches south to the Cape and Vizhinjam.¹⁶⁶

The rulers of Travancore (Venad) adopted a policy of cautious diplomacy toward the Portuguese, carefully balancing the advantages of maritime cooperation with the need

¹⁶⁰ K.S. Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Early Sixteenth Century* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1983), 87–92. See also dutchportcities.globalasiaprogram.org/WikipediaKiddle.

¹⁶¹ A.R. Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 53–147.

¹⁶² See Archaeological/Historic summaries: WikipediaKerala Tourism; See also travel-historical overview: Colonial Voyage.

¹⁶³ Malekandathil Pius, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India, 1500–1663* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), 55–60.

¹⁶⁴ M.N. Pearson, *The Portuguese in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 64–71.

¹⁶⁵ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 315–28.

¹⁶⁶ A. Joseph, "Situating the Development of Vizhinjam Port," *Journal of the Centre for Heritage Studies* 7 (2014): 307–371. See also heritageuniversityofkerala.comResearchGate.

to manage the power of the Zamorin of Calicut and other regional rivals. In Quilon, treaty arrangements in the early sixteenth century granted the Portuguese certain commercial privileges, including customs concessions and preferential access to the pepper trade. In return, Portuguese commanders pledged naval protection and military assistance to the local rulers.¹⁶⁷

Portuguese punitive expeditions and blockade tactics changed village politics along the south-western littoral, marginalising supports who rejected the crown's alliances.¹⁶⁸

3.3.2 Relationship between Portuguese officials and missionaries

The *Padroado*, through a series of papal gifts allowed the Portuguese Crown to present bishops, establish ecclesiastical buildings, and manage mission areas in Asia which served as the legal-religious basis for Iberian missions.¹⁶⁹ In reality, *Padroado* meant that the stipends, shipping, and licenses that friars and Jesuits relied on were under the supervision of captains-major at Cochin and factors at Quilon.¹⁷⁰ The rulers have given some building funds for the good missions into the parish boundaries.

3.4 Church-Building and Institutional Development

Since the early decades of Portuguese expansion along the Malabar coast, the Latin Catholic Church in Trivandrum has experienced transformative growth in both materially, through church edifices and religious institutions, and institutionally, through ecclesiastical structuring of parishes, clergy, and governance. Church-building and organisational consolidation went hand in hand, thanks to *Padroado* support, missionary zeal, and adaptability to local situations.

3.4.1 Construction of Churches and religious institutions

When Portuguese missionaries and authorities arrived, they brought not only the Christian faith, but also European ecclesiastical architectural models. Stone churches with

¹⁶⁷ K.S. Mathew, *Indo-Portuguese Trade and the Fates of Empires* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1997), 41–45.

¹⁶⁸ Stephen Dale, “Coercion and Commerce on the Malabar Coast,” *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 31, no. 1 (1988): 83–105.

¹⁶⁹ See [Encyclopedia.com Oxford Reference Encyclopedia Britannica](https://www.encyclopedia.com/Oxford-Reference/Encyclopedia-Britannica)

¹⁷⁰ A.R. Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, vol. 2, 10-201.

basilican layouts and vaulted roofs were built in major coastal cities such as Cochin and Goa to proclaim the permanence of Christianity and the Portuguese Crown's rule. These structures served religious and political purposes, acting as both liturgical centres and visual marks of imperial influence.¹⁷¹

Some models were imitated in Trivandrum, albeit with modifications to meet local building standards. Timber, particularly teak, and native hardwoods were frequently used for superstructures, roofing, and carpentry, while foundations and walls were built using coral-lime mortar or laterite, both of which were abundant and familiar to local artisans.¹⁷² As a result, churches merged Latin spatial layouts (nave, chancel, and side-altars) with local vernacular aesthetics, resulting in a hybrid typology visible in surviving early constructions as well as later narratives of reconstruction.¹⁷³

But patronage played a crucial role here. Under the *Padroado* system, Portuguese captains, merchants, and officials used their royal status to obtain permission from local rajas to build mission churches. These donations frequently included land, protection, and occasionally even labour contributions, distinguishing them as both ecclesiastical and governmental structures.¹⁷⁴ In minor port towns surrounding Trivandrum, local Christian communities and missionary orders collaborated to raise finances for making small churches and associated institutions such as hospices, schools and confraternities that served sacramental, educational and charitable services.¹⁷⁵

Franciscan convents and Jesuit colleges were built close or next to churches. Though small, they worked as training and logistical hubs for clergy and catechists. According to Jesuit archives, during the late 16th century, mission homes served as centres for education (typically in Portuguese and Malayalam), fundamental medical care, and pastoral planning, expanding the church's reach into coastal villages.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Robert Erik Frykenberg., *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present*, (Oxford University Press, 2008), 102–105.

¹⁷² Kumar, P., “Vernacular Architecture Meets Missionary Space: Church Building on the Malabar Coast, 1500–1600,” *Journal of South Asian Studies* 34, no. 2 (2015): 211–229.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 223–225.

¹⁷⁴ Kochuthresia, K.J., *Faith and Forts: Padroado Patronage in Malabar*, Asian Educational Services, 2010, 57–68.

¹⁷⁵ Menachery, G., “Missionary Institutions in Early Portuguese Kerala,” in *Saint Thomas Christians: A Brief History (1498–1750)*, ed. George Menachery, St. Thomas Christian Historical Institute, 2013, 45–67.

¹⁷⁶ Saldanha, T.J., *Jesuit Missions in South India, 1542–1610*, Jesuit Publications, 2000, 89–112.

3.4.2 Organization of ecclesiastical structures (parishes, clergy, etc.)

Material construction was simply the beginning; sustained presence necessitated administrative structures. From the beginning, the Diocese of Goa (established in 1534) had authority over Malabar, including Trivandrum, under *Padroado* privileges. Portuguese bishops and archdeacons directed missionary work, assigned clergy, and organised visits, even distant communities.¹⁷⁷ Missionaries travelled itinerantly, celebrating sacraments in fishing hamlets or chapels associated with certain trade groupings. However, as Christian populations increased these informal centres developed into parishes with defined boundaries and frequent clergy visits.¹⁷⁸

Coastal missions close to Trivandrum operated as organised parishes by the late 16th century, with regular pastoral visits or permanent priests. Parish responsibilities, including birth and marriage records, catechesis, and funerals, were progressively codified and frequently recorded in registers that were approved by the *padroado* and kept up to date by parish priests or mission superiors.¹⁷⁹ Staffing represented a structured clerical body, with religious order priests (particularly Franciscans and Jesuits), and the clergy appointed by *Padroado*, and locally trained catechists and sacristans who served as intermediaries between European missionaries and Malayalam-speaking congregants.¹⁸⁰

By 1600, the Latin Church in Trivandrum was supported by three main elements: (1) long-lasting, hybrid-built church buildings that served as the foundation for Christian communities; (2) a growing, organised parish network with distinct sacramental roles; and (3) administrative supervision under *Padroado* bishops, missionary orders, and local assistants. A strong institutional basis was established by these factors, one that was able to endure political unrest and subsequent missionary reconfigurations.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Bayly, S., *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, 134–140.

¹⁷⁸ Menachery, “Missionary Institutions,” 50–55.

¹⁷⁹ Dias, P.A., *Registers of the Padroado Parishes: Archdiocese of Goa, 1580–1620*, Goa University Press, 1998, 5–20.

¹⁸⁰ Saldanha, *Jesuit Missions*, 105–110.

¹⁸¹ Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 178–180.

3.5 Impact of the Synod of Diamper (1599)

3.5.1 Unification of Various Christian Sects under the Latin Rite

The Synod of Diamper, convened by Archbishop Aleixo de Menezes in June 1599, officially united the independent St. Thomas Christian communities (who had traditionally maintained East Syriac traditions) with the Roman Catholic Church and established Portuguese *Padroado* authority. It severed their ecclesiastical links with the Church of the East, renamed the Metropolitan See of Malabar the Diocese of Angamaly (making it a suffragan of the Archbishopric of Goa), and enforced Latin liturgical, administrative, and theological standards.¹⁸²

The Synod put an end to centuries of pluralistic Eastern-rite practice by requiring local ecclesiastical leaders, including the Archdeacon, to canonically appoint Latin bishops. It abolished the long-standing liturgical commemoration of the Persian patriarch and replaced it with explicit devotion to the Pope as global primate.¹⁸³ This reconfiguration created a coherent Latin ecclesial identity and laid the administrative and spiritual groundwork for the Latin Church in Malabar, including Trivandrum. The Synod strengthened expectations for clerical discipline, sacramental record-keeping, and baptism and marriage standards while also validating common practices for the Latin communities associated with Tangasseri and the southern coast, such as Latin catechisms, Roman ritual books, and hierarchical parish structures.¹⁸⁴

3.5.2 Key reforms and their influence on the Latin Church in Trivandrum

The Diamper Synod firmly united disparate Eastern Christian traditions under a centralised Latin Catholic organisation in Malabar. Its liturgical, sacramental, hierarchical, textual, and social reforms firmly established the Latin Church's structural and devotional roots in places such as Trivandrum. While this brought about ecclesiastical discipline and Roman unity, it also caused a cultural disruption, identity loss, and later challenges.

¹⁸² Unification under Latin Padroado; suppression of East Syriac structure—*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “Synod of Diamper” [Encyclopedia Britannica](#); *Saint Thomas Christians*, Wikipedia [Wikipedia](#); *Archdiocese of Angamaly*, Wikipedia [Wikipedia](#).

¹⁸³ Replacement of Persian patriarch liturgical references with papal primacy—*Joint Statement on the Synod of Diamper*, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity [christianunity.va](#).

¹⁸⁴ See synodal decree summaries: [Scribd](#)

3.5.2.1 The Forced Liturgical Latinizations

Some liturgical reforms were enforced by the Synod, which replaced the revered East Syriac Rite (Addai and Mari) with purified and Latinized versions and banned Syriac liturgical texts that were thought to be Nestorian. These changes brought vestments, rubrics, theological nuances, and Eucharistic formulas into accordance with Western practices.¹⁸⁵ Indigenous liturgical expressions were interrupted by these changes.

3.5.2.2 Uniformity of the Sacraments

Local variations were superseded by Latin canonical requirements for the standardisation of all sacraments, including baptism, marriage, and confession. This demanded retraining clergy and laypeople in locations such as Trivandrum.¹⁸⁶

3.5.2.3 Reorganization of Jurisdiction

To subordinate the Archdeacon and native clergy to the Archbishop of Goa under the Padroado, the Synod took away their independent ecclesiastical power. Trivandrum's local churches were now governed by a hierarchical Latin system that reduced the independence of native clergy.¹⁸⁷

3.5.2.4 Loss and Censorship of Syriac Manuscripts

A prominent result of the Synod was the systematic destruction or censorship of Syriac manuscripts judged heretical, while others were corrected or lost entirely. This action significantly reduced Trivandrum's Syriac literary and religious history.¹⁸⁸

3.5.2.5 The Social and the Cultural Reforms

The Synod issued regulations opposing or prohibiting old social customs such as caste-based ceremonies, impurity rules, and inheritance practices in favour of Latin

¹⁸⁵ Liturgical purging and Latinization of Addai and Mari—*Synod of Diamper*, Encyclopedia Britannica [Encyclopedia Britannica](#); Liturgy of Addai and Mari, Christian Classics Ethereal Library (CCEL) [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#).

¹⁸⁶ Extent of liturgical reforms modifying rubrics, vestments, variables—*The Eucharistic Liturgy of the St Thomas Christians*, Academia.edu/Pallath [Academia](#).

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁸⁸ Destruction and censorship of Syriac manuscripts—*Joint Statement on the Synod of Diamper* [christianunity.va](#).

Christian moral principles.¹⁸⁹ This altered long-standing socio-religious practices in Trivandrum, transforming communal identity with European Christian principles.

3.6 Social and Cultural Transformation

3.6.1 Integration of Latin Catholicism with local customs and traditions

The development of Latin Catholicism in Trivandrum was not an easy transplant of Iberian religious life, but rather a complex process of adaptation, negotiation, and selective rejection. Missionaries arriving through the Estado da Índia, such as Franciscans and Jesuits, immediately recognised that evangelising in the Malabar region required sensitivity to caste-coded social patterns, linguistic registers, and ritual aesthetics common to Malayalam-speaking people.¹⁹⁰ Catechesis, liturgical performance, and charity activities were therefore altered to appeal to local sensibilities while, in theory, maintaining doctrinal integrity.

The main integration was linguistic and didactic. Missionaries created rudimentary catechisms, prayers, and devotional hymns in Malayalam and Tamil for coastal parishes dependent on Trivandrum's maritime commerce.¹⁹¹ Oral instruction (upadeśa)¹⁹² commonly used analogies from local ethical categories—dharma and kartavya (duty)—to explain Christian concepts within a Christological framework. The use of processional piety also demonstrated a multicultural grammar. Perunnal festivals, which include images carried through the streets accompanied by drums and wind instruments, recast Iberian confraternity culture in the auditory and visual atmosphere of temple-centric communities.¹⁹³ Architecturally, the missionary churches of the 16th century used a mixed language. Timber superstructures were supported by stone or laterite bases, with pitched tile roofs, verandas, and open porticos to channel monsoon rains and allow for congregational overflow on feast days.¹⁹⁴ Sometimes included a

¹⁸⁹ Social reforms suppressing customs and imposing Latin norms—*Timeline of Oriental Orthodoxy in India (St. Thomas Christianity)*, OrthodoxWiki orthodoxwiki.org.

¹⁹⁰ M. N. Pearson, *The Portuguese in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 111–15.

¹⁹¹ Joseph Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India, Vol. II: From the Middle of the Sixteenth Century to the End of the Seventeenth Century* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1982), 35–38; Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 226–29.

¹⁹² Upadesa is a theological spiritual instruction or the teachings according to the Buddhism or Hinduism.

¹⁹³ Pius Malekandathil, *Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Polity in the Indian Ocean* (Delhi: Primus, 2010), 247–51.

¹⁹⁴ George Menachery, ed., *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, Vol. 2 (Trichur: 1982), 154–58.

simple Latin cross alongside locally recognised ogee arches and carved wooden doors. Though cruciform ground layouts and eastward altars indicated a Latin liturgical emphasis, the buildings' climatic and artisanal adaptability required collaboration between Portuguese patrons and Kerala craftsmen.¹⁹⁵

Negotiated modification was also made to familial customs and Christian marriage practices. Missionaries accepted some aspects of tradition, such as gift-giving, singing, and kin-mediated discussions, as long as they did not involve caste-exclusionary feasts that were incompatible with Christian fellowship, even though they insisted on monogamy, the printing of banns, and sacramental form.¹⁹⁶ The moral economy of charity also served as an intercultural meeting place. Hospitals and poor relief, sometimes sponsored by confraternities, depend on both Catholic *caritas* and local patronage patterns, increasing the Church's social legitimacy among fishing communities, artisans, and marginalised castes.¹⁹⁷

3.6.2 Conversion and resistance among the local population

Conversions in and around Trivandrum took place at the intersection of spiritual conviction, social strategy, and geopolitical upheaval caused by Portuguese maritime expansion. The patterns vary with each community. Along the coast, intense conversions among the fisher castes resulted in tight parish communities related to Portuguese trade and coastal defences.¹⁹⁸ Individual households in market towns converted more slowly, frequently negotiating baptism against the backdrop of caste punishments, marital relationships, and guild participation.¹⁹⁹

Resistance took many forms. At one extreme, there were open conflicts boycotts, ostracism, or even violence when baptism challenged caste systems or communal stability.²⁰⁰ More often, resistance was ordinary and pragmatic: a refusal to forsake

¹⁹⁵ K. S. Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1983), 219–22.

¹⁹⁶ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India, Vol. II*, 61–64.

¹⁹⁷ Neill, *A History of Christianity in India*, 233–35; M. N. Pearson, “Merchants and Missionaries in Sixteenth-Century India,” in *India and the Indian Ocean in the Age of Discovery*, ed. A. R. Disney (London: Variorum, 1980), 89–93.

¹⁹⁸ Georg Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times*, Vol. II (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1977), 250–58; Thekkedath, *Vol. II*, 75–79.

¹⁹⁹ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia 1500–1700: A political and economic History*, (London: Longman, 1993), 164–68.

²⁰⁰ Neill, *A History of Christianity in India*, 236–38.

specific ceremonial meals, the preservation of life-cycle rites with pre-Christian aspects, or the silent maintenance of kinship endogamy patterns.²⁰¹ Even among the baptised, missionaries decried "nominalism" and "relapses," expressions that reflect both European pastoral aspirations and local theological ambiguity.²⁰²

The most intractable obstacle were the castes. Missionaries frequently agreed to separate seating or feasting arrangements in order to keep converts and avoid scandal, even while the egalitarian demands of the Gospel were emphasised in their sermons.²⁰³ A legacy that would endure beyond the 16th century was the hardening of socioeconomic division within parishes as a result of such concessions. However, documented instances of cross-caste solidarity in fraternal life and during group reactions to calamities (illness, storm surges) were made possible by Christian identification, indicating that Catholic belonging occasionally transcended inflexible hierarchies.²⁰⁴

The St. Thomas Christian community, centred north of Trivandrum but interconnected by trade and pilgrimage, offered a unique type of resistance an ecclesiological one rather than sociological. Many people opposed full Latinization, citing their pride in apostolic antiquity and Syriac liturgy.²⁰⁵ Latin missionaries viewed many Syriac writings and practices with distrust, while Syrian elites feared subordination to the Padroado system. While the Synod of Diamper strove to address what it saw as faults, the following century demonstrated the durability of non-Latin identities, although with internal fracture.²⁰⁶ These frictions indirectly impacted Latin growth in the south, developing the Latin Church's self-understanding and pastoral techniques towards both "new" converts and historic Christian neighbours.

Despite the conflicts, the 16th century saw a gradual Christianization of time, space, and sociability in sections of Trivandrum.

3.7 Challenges and Conflicts Faced by the Early Church

3.7.1 Religious opposition and social challenges

²⁰¹ Thekkedath, *Vol. II*, 82–85.

²⁰² Subrahmanyam, *Portuguese Empire in Asia*, 170–72.

²⁰³ P. J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1970), 118–122.

²⁰⁴ Pearson, "Merchants and Missionaries," 95–98.

²⁰⁵ Placid J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians* (Bombay: st. Paul publications, 1970) 23.

²⁰⁶ *The Synod of Diamper*, ed. Malekandathil, Decrees V–VII;

The early Latin Catholic presence in Trivandrum (Venad/Travancore) took place in a religiously diverse landscape moulded by temple-centered Hindu polities, established caste hierarchies, and commerce networks anchored to the Arabian sea. The establishment of Latin-rite pastoral systems by Franciscan, Dominican, and eventually Jesuit missionaries depended on and complicated Portuguese commercial-military supremacy along the coast. In this atmosphere, "opposition" rarely manifested itself as uniform persecution; rather, it took the form of social friction, legal barriers, and occasional unrest that challenged parish and catechetical routine stability.²⁰⁷

Cast, Purity and Ritual Economy

The social structure of 16th century -Venad- was organised around graded conceptions of ritual purity, with Brahmin authority, temple endowments, and localised corporate entities (nair chiefs, guild-like institutions) determining access to property, labour, and public resources.²⁰⁸ Baptism and catechesis frequently showed changes in commensality, marriage choices, and ceremonial involvement, posing a challenge to family and caste position.²⁰⁹ Resistance was most usually met with "soft" sanctions, such as denial of access to water sources or shared necessities, limits on land leasing, and familial pressure to attend temple observances.²¹⁰

Missionaries learnt to create pastoral routines that minimised clear confrontation while maintaining a unique Christian identity. They established modest schools linked to chapels, encouraged confraternities, and timed processions to avoid conflict with major temple feasts.²¹¹

Royal courts, petitions, and the politics of permission

Portuguese captains and factors argued with Venad's kings over landing rights, timber, and permission to build or repair churches. Royal consent may secure community

²⁰⁷ M. N. Pearson, *The Portuguese in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 50–77; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5–6.

²⁰⁸ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 92–124; K. N. Panikkar, *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 1–2.

²⁰⁹ Ines G. Županov, *Missionary Tropics: The Catholic Frontier in India (16th–17th Centuries)* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 77–110.

²¹⁰ Pius Malekandathil, *Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Polity in the Indian Ocean* (Delhi: Primus, 2010), 173–90.

²¹¹ Ananya Chakravarti, *The Empire of Apostles: Religion, Accommodatio, and the Imagination of Empire in Early Modern Brazil and India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), 86–137.

space, but it came with the expectation of reciprocity military support, gifts, or economic concessions which not all missionaries could meet.²¹² When Portuguese naval enforcement against non-cartaz shipping reduces local revenue, authorisations may be delayed or secretly revoked.²¹³

Scarcity of people, Language and Sacramental gaps

There were some gaps in sacramental coverage, particularly in the areas of confession and marriage regulation, which were caused by irregular clerical supply, the distances from Goa and Cochin, and difficulties learning the language like Malayalam, occasionally Tamil.²¹⁴ Due to material limitations like lumber, laterite, and roof repairs, which were dependent on varying alms from fleets or benefactors, parish finances were in a precarious situation that endangered the continuation of charity and education.²¹⁵

3.7.2 Interaction with other religious communities (Hindus, Muslims, St. Thomas Christians)

Hindus

The most common encounter was with temple-centered Hindu society. Missionaries rapidly recognised that major theological debates were less important in daily life than whether Christians could draw water, marry without being rejected, and trade in markets. Parish schools and confraternities served as counter-institutions to the temple's ritual economy, providing literacy, mutual aid, and devotional rhythms that shaped an identifiable Catholic public.²¹⁶

Tensions rose around public symbols like bells, crosses, and processions. To avoid confrontations, clergy frequently chose routes that did not cross sacred precincts, changed timings to avoid festival peaks, and framed processions as acts of penitence and charity rather than success.²¹⁷ While some Hindu headmen allowed these rituals to maintain market order, others saw the exposure of Catholic ritual as a challenge to local authority. In a few communities, retaliatory fines or boycott threats were used to discourage

²¹² K. S. Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century* (Delhi: Manohar, 1983), 205-211.

²¹³ Pearson, *Portuguese in India*, 50-77.

²¹⁴ Disney, *Portuguese Empire*, vol. 2, 89-176.

²¹⁵ Mathew, *Portuguese Trade*, 200-235.

²¹⁶ Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 92-124; See also Chakravarti, *Empire of Apostles*, 86-165.

²¹⁷ Županov, *Missionary Tropics*, 102-145.

catechesis attendance; conversely, periods of famine or epidemic created corridors of cooperation when parish charities provided grain or organised care for the ill across communal boundaries.²¹⁸

Muslims

Relations with Muslims were impacted by both maritime political economy and theology. The cartaz system routed traffic to *Estado*'s-controlled nodes and criminalised unlicensed shipping, upsetting the long-standing commerce of Mappila and Arab networks through Quilon/Kollam and surrounding ports.²¹⁹ Naval clashes and seizures strengthened communal perceptions, with coastal Muslims seeing the emergence of Latin parishes as another kind of Portuguese imperialism.²²⁰

Onshore, however, coexistence was normal. Christians and Muslims shared markets, worked together in shipping and warehousing, and occasionally developed pragmatic alliances in neighbourhood government. Polemic conversations about prophecy, scripture, and the Trinity are recorded in missionary letters, as are gestures of neighbourliness in times of crisis.²²¹ Catholic credibility increased when clergy publicly distanced pastoral care from coercive enforcement, such as supporting equitable treatment of Muslim merchants in local disputes or assisting all fire and storm victims, regardless of belief.²²²

St. Thomas Christians

Portuguese observers often expressed both admiration for the antiquity of the St. Thomas Christian tradition and concern over what they perceived as doctrinal and ecclesiastical irregularities. Consequently, they sought to bring these communities under a more uniform system of governance and doctrine through Latin episcopal supervision.²²³ These efforts culminated in the Synod of Diamper which issued decrees

²¹⁸ Malekandathil, *Maritime India*, 195–228.

²¹⁹ Pearson, *Portuguese in India*, 50–77.

²²⁰ Dale, *Mappilas of Malabar*, 23–41.

²²¹ Chakravarti, *Empire of Apostles*, 187–220.

²²² Disney, *Portuguese Empire*, vol. 2, 190–202.

²²³ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History* (London: Longman, 1993), 210–212.

condemning certain Syriac works, standardising doctrine, and imposing changes that effectively Latinized portions of worship and discipline.²²⁴

Although gathered in Cochin, the Synod's reach stretched to the southern shore; clergy and lay families with commercial ties to Trivandrum felt the effects.²²⁵ Diamper promised unity and orthodoxy to Latin pastors, but it challenged many Syriac Christians' ancestral customs and local authority under their Archdeacon.²²⁶ In that period we can see the shared devotion to saints, occasional collaborative advocacy in courts, and collaboration in education enabled local concessions that are not usually obvious in polemical literature.²²⁷

3.8 Contributions of Key Missionaries and Clergy

The growth of the Latin Catholic Church in Trivandrum between 1500 and 1600 was strongly related to the efforts of missionaries and clergy. These European and local elites served as cultural mediators, lecturers, and institution builders, as well as religious leaders. Their contributions impacted the Christian presence in the region and left an impact that would influence the growth of the Catholic Church for centuries to come.

3.8.1 Prominent figures in the church's growth and their legacies

The Franciscans

Franciscan friars were among the first missionaries to come on the Malabar coast. Their original mission in Trivandrum was pastoral, ministering to Portuguese merchants and settlers before progressively expanding to the local fishing people. They established modest chapels at trading terminals and seaside settlements, laying the groundwork for stronger Christian communities. Their commitment to humility and service was evident in their involvement in education and humanitarian work, particularly among the poor and marginalised communities of coastal Trivandrum.²²⁸ Franciscan friars, who arrived with the first fleets, built the first chapels near the Quilon plant and its suburban area at

²²⁴ Pius Malekandathil, "The Synod of Diamper: A Historical Perspective," in *Church and Culture in Kerala*, ed. Bosco Puthur (Kochi: LRC, 2002), 75–101.

²²⁵ Perczel, "Saint Thomas Christians," 400-456.

²²⁶ Malekandathil, "Synod of Diamper," 75–101.

²²⁷ Perczel, "Saint Thomas Christians," 400-456.

²²⁸ Latin Archdiocese of Trivandrum, "History," *Latin Archdiocese of Trivandrum*, accessed August 2025, <https://latinarchdiocesetrivandrum.org>.

Tangasseri.²²⁹ Their parochial circuits extended southward, occasionally, to areas near Vizhinjam. A common pattern emerged: a cross was raised, a thatched chapel was built, a catechist was chosen from among the local neophytes, and periodic visits combined preaching with baptismal and marriage regularisation.²³⁰ The Tangasseri and Vizhinjam's old harbour, located south of Kerala, served as a coastal anchor for local shipping during the 16th century, despite political fluctuations in the mediaeval years. Archaeological excavations and regional historiography confirm the site's extensive nautical history and the presence of pre-modern defences.²³¹ Crown officials provided material, lime, or protection, particularly when a chapel was located near a watchtower.

Despite their limited resources, the Franciscans exposed the locals to Christian liturgical practices. They illustrated the versatility of Catholic practice by celebrating the sacraments in simple places, such as palm-leaf cottages. The Franciscan legacy in Trivandrum is based not on great institutions, but on their commitment to simplicity, which made Christianity accessible to coastal people.²³²

St. Francis Xavier

The arrival of St. Francis Xavier in India in 1542 showed a historic turning point in missionary activity along the Malabar Coast. Though his activity was mostly concentrated in Goa, Travancore, and the Pearl Fishery Coast, his impact spread to Trivandrum, where fisherfolk were receptive to his message. His missionary technique blended direct evangelisation with the training of catechists among indigenous converts, allowing the Gospel message to spread quickly even in areas where European missionaries could not always remain.²³³

The letters of Xavier show his genuine concern for newly baptised Christians, particularly their need for religious instruction and moral discipline. He was a great supporter of establishing schools where children might learn prayers, catechism, and the principles of Christian doctrine.²³⁴ Since 1542, the Jesuits especially St Francis Xavier

²²⁹ George Menachery, ed., *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, vol. 2 (Trichur: 1973) 153-170.

²³⁰ Pearson, *Portuguese in India*, 25-104.

²³¹ See heritageuniversityofkerala.com/ResearchGate.

²³² Kerala Tourism, "Christianity in Kerala: Missionary Activities," *Kerala Tourism*, accessed August 2025, <https://www.keralatourism.org>.

²³³ "St. Francis Xavier," *Wikipedia*, last modified 2025, accessed August 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Xavier.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*,

have expanded their mission focus down the southern coast. Xavier's letters from Tuticorin, Cochin, and the Comorin coast clearly show catechesis in fishing areas, as well as the dependency on Portuguese governors for escorts, teachers, and material support.²³⁵ While much of Xavier's most intensive work took place just east of Cape Comorin, his coastal circuits and the institutional structures they established (schools, confraternities, and catechists) impacted communities that traded with Quilon and Vizhinjam and moved along the same maritime corridor as Trivandrum's fishermen.²³⁶

His contribution to Christianity in Trivandrum was twofold: he encouraged a generation of native catechists to carry on his mission, and he set a model of missionary enthusiasm that the Jesuits would later emulate.²³⁷

The Jesuits

Following Francis Xavier, the Jesuits strengthened the Catholic presence in Kerala, particularly Trivandrum. They put a significant focus on methodical catechesis, education, and moral change. Jesuit missionaries established schools and promoted Christian marital practices, aiming to replace indigenous customs with Christian values. Their method was more institutional than the Franciscans', and they wanted to keep newly converted communities firmly planted in the Catholic faith.²³⁸

Although occasional disagreements with local norms, Jesuits that include Henrique Henriques pioneered inculturation by studying local languages and writing catechisms in Tamil and Malayalam. This inculturation made Christian teaching more accessible and let the faith to grow deeper inside the culture of Trivandrum.²³⁹

Archbishop Menezes

Archbishop Aleixo de Menezes of Goa was another well-known figure whose influence reached to Trivandrum. The invitation of the Synod of Diamper in 1599 intended to bring the ancient St Thomas Christians in line with Roman Catholic faith. While the synod was primarily concerned with Kerala's Syriac Christians, its ripple

²³⁵ *The Life and Letters of St. Francis Xavier*, ed. H.J. Coleridge, 2 vols. (London: 1872–74), esp. vol. 1, Letters XIII–XIV (Tuticorin/Cochin, 1543–1544). [Internet Archive+Iweb.bc.edu](#).

²³⁶ [Internet Archive+Iweb.bc.edu](#).

²³⁷ Catholic Connect, “Legacy of St. Francis Xavier,” accessed August 2025, <https://catholicconnect.in>.

²³⁸ K. Gopalankutty, *History and Contributions of the Jesuits in Kerala (1542–1773)* (University of Calicut Repository, accessed August 2025), <https://scholar.uoc.ac.in>.

²³⁹ Kerala Jesuits, “Jesuits in Kerala,” accessed August 2025, <https://www.keralajesuits.org>.

effects reached to Trivandrum's Latin communities. Menezes' efforts at unity highlighted the growing institutionalisation of Catholicism in Kerala, which strengthened Latin Catholic identity as part of a larger ecclesial system under Portuguese patronage.²⁴⁰

3.8.2 Role of European and local clergy in the development of the Church

The European Clergy

European missionaries served as the first leaders of Trivandrum's developing Christian congregations. The Franciscans and Jesuits, in particular, provided priests to perform the sacraments, run parishes, and establish educational institutions. Their foreign ancestry provided them authority in the eyes of colonial rulers and church superiors, but it also caused cultural differences with the native community. These missionaries frequently struggled with language, caste dynamics, and alien practices, which limited their reaches of influence.²⁴¹

However, their contributions were foundational. They ensured that the faith was not merely preached but also organised into communities. They established the catholic identity of Trivandrum by erecting chapels, training catechists, and instituting liturgical discipline.²⁴²

The Local Clergy

The development of local pastors and catechists was essential to the Church's long-term viability in Trivandrum. European missionaries began depending more and more on local converts to act as lay leaders, teachers, and interpreters in the middle of the 16th century. The spreading of the faith in regional languages and cultural forms was greatly aided by these men and women. Even in the absence of priests, they catechised children, baptised adults, and protected Christian customs in villages.²⁴³

The participation of catechists who were fishermen in particular aided in the quick spread of Christianity among coastal villages. Local authorities made sure that Christianity was viewed as a religion that could be practiced in Kerala's cultural context

²⁴⁰ B. S. Tharakunnel, "The Synod of Diamper (1599) Revisited in the Light of CCEO," *Iustitia* (2021), accessed August 2025, <https://dvkjournals.in>.

²⁴¹ Kerala Tourism, "Christianity in Kerala: Missionary Activities," *Kerala Tourism*, accessed August 2025, <https://www.keralatourism.org>.

²⁴² Latin Archdiocese of Trivandrum, "History," *Latin Archdiocese of Trivandrum*, accessed August 2025, <https://latinarchdiocesetrivandrum.org>.

²⁴³ CMSF Global, "History of Latin Catholics in Kerala," accessed August 2025, <https://cmsfglobal.com>.

rather than as a faith. They provided the Church a genuinely local face by serving as a bridge between the native community and European clergy.²⁴⁴

The cooperation between European missionaries and the local clergy was defined by both constructive collaboration and occasional conflict. European priests relied on local catechists for linguistic and cultural mediation, but they also distrusted local practices because to concerns about syncretism. Despite these disagreements, the cooperation proved critical to the Church's growth. Without the contribution of local clerics, the missionaries' work would not have taken root in Trivandrum society.²⁴⁵

3.9 Legacy of the 16th Century: Foundations for Future Expansion

3.9.1 Long-term impacts of the 16th century growth on future Church expansion

The 16th century was an important period in the development of the Latin Catholic Church in Trivandrum. Although the region did not have the same level of Portuguese colonial infrastructure as Goa or Cochin, its coastal settlements were integrated into the larger religious, commercial, and cultural frameworks of the Portuguese *Estado da India*. The gradual introduction of parish life, catechesis, and devotional activities during this century resulted in a long-lasting Catholic presence, laying the groundwork for future expansion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²⁴⁶

The first long-term impact of 16th century changes was the creation of parish-based villages along the Trivandrum coast. These were not huge structures, but rather little chapels built in fishing settlements, generally with thatched roofs and plain altars, where missionaries celebrated Mass and administered sacraments.²⁴⁷ The establishment of baptismal and marital registers helped these communities maintain a sense of historical continuity and identity.²⁴⁸ The presence of confraternities, such as the Rosary Confraternity, helped to shape devotional life by incorporating Catholic activities into the

²⁴⁴ Benjamin Bailey Foundation, "Missionary Contributions in Kerala," accessed August 2025, <https://benjaminbaileyfoundation.org>.

²⁴⁵ K. Gopalankutty, *History and Contributions of the Jesuits in Kerala (1542–1773)* (University of Calicut Repository, accessed August 2025), <https://scholar.uoc.ac.in>.

²⁴⁶ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A political and economic History*, (London: Longman, 1993), 44–60.

²⁴⁷ George Menachery, ed., *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, Vol. II (Trichur: St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India, 1973), 209–220.

²⁴⁸ Charles R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415–1825* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), 110–118.

local cultural rhythm.²⁴⁹ Such structures brought consistency to religious life and stability when European missionaries were limited or absent.

The second enduring impact was the merging of Christian evangelisation with the sailing and fishing industries that dominated Trivandrum's coastal life. Missionaries, particularly Jesuits, combined pastoral care with advocacy for fishermen, securing their safety from exploitation and providing moral education pertinent to their daily problems.²⁵⁰ Fishing communities frequently supplied financial assistance for parish feasts, chapel maintenance, and clergy nourishment, so integrating Christianity into the practical realities of local life.²⁵¹ This economic integration reduced the Church's need on colonial subsidies and increased its connection to indigenous structures, which proved critical when the Portuguese political presence decreased.

Another lasting influence was the development of indigenous leadership within the Church. With a limited number of European missionaries, catechists, sacristans, and lay leaders selected from local families became critical to the continuation of Christian life.²⁵² These leaders were in charge of teaching prayers, keeping parish registers, preparing catechumens for baptism, and planning feasts.²⁵³ Long after Portuguese rule decreased, such local action maintained Catholic identity and facilitated organic spread through familial networks. Later missionary groups, such as the Carmelites, increased pastoral work in the region by building on this structure of local leadership.²⁵⁴

The *Padroado's* legal system was also a valuable inheritance. The establishment of the Diocese of Cochin in 1558 placed the Latin Christians of Kerala, including those in Trivandrum, under definite diocesan control.²⁵⁵ This permitted the regularisation of sacramental faculties, episcopal visitations, and ecclesiastical discipline. Despite its geographical distance, Cochin served as a judicial anchor for southern ecclesiastical

²⁴⁹ K. J. Pathil, "Catechesis and Education in Early Kerala Missions," *Indian Church History Review* 18, no. 2 (1984): 101–120.

²⁵⁰ Georg Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times*, Vol. II (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1977), 120–154.

²⁵¹ Pius Malekandathil, *Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Polity in the Indian Ocean* (Delhi: Primus, 2010), 220–233.

²⁵² A. Mathias Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India, Vol. II: From the Middle of the Sixteenth to the End of the Seventeenth Century* (Bangalore: CHAI, 1989), 150–168.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 168–172.

²⁵⁴ George O. Paikada, "Marriage Discipline in Early Latin Kerala," *Kerala Church History Journal* 12 (1986): 41–59.

²⁵⁵ George Menachery, ed., *Indian Church History Classics, Vol. I: The Nazranies* (Ollur: HIRS Publications, 1998), 312–316

activity. The Synod of Diamper in 1599, while mostly directed at St Thomas Christians, reaffirmed catechetical and disciplinary rules across Kerala.²⁵⁶ For the Latin Christians in Trivandrum, this meant deeper integration with the universal Church and a sense of being associated to a greater Catholic identity.

The spread of Latin devotional culture left a lasting impression. Popular traditions like the Rosary, Marian feasts, processions, and Eucharistic devotions were introduced and promptly taken up by the spiritual.²⁵⁷

These legacies provided a solid foundation for the Latin Catholic Church in Trivandrum. The decentralisation of parish structures, their integration into local economies, the rise of indigenous leadership, the legal consolidation of *Padroado* authority, and the spread of devotional culture ensured that the Church was able to sustain political upheavals and continue to grow for centuries to come.²⁵⁸

3.9.2 Key turning points during the 1500-1600 period

Several major turning moments happened in the Trivandrum region between 1500 and 1600, shaping the long-term legacies of the 16th century. These events marked the change from a fragile missionary presence to a more established and strong ecclesial community.

The Portuguese arrival on the Malabar–Travancore coast in the early 1500s was the first important event. Portuguese ships went in Quilon, a significant port close to Trivandrum, bringing with them missionaries and chaplains who started serving both local Christians and non-Christians.²⁵⁹ Although there was no Portuguese fort at Trivandrum, the coastal residents there were attracted to participate in these trading and evangelisation networks. Local communities were first exposed to Latin Christian practices on a long-term basis through this initial contact.

The second breakthrough moment occurred in the 1510s-1520s, when the Portuguese established their town at Tangasseri (Quilon). Fortifications, chapels, and

²⁵⁶ Jacob Vellian, *The Synod of Diamper* (Alleppey: Yuvadeepti, 1973), 25–46.

²⁵⁷ Menachery, *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia*, 420–428.

²⁵⁸ Subrahmanyam, *Portuguese Empire in Asia*, 200–212.

²⁵⁹ A. P. Ibrahim Kunju, *Medieval Kerala* (Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society, 1979), 182–188.

trading posts provided a stable base for missionary activities.²⁶⁰ Tangasseri clergy provided regular access to sacraments and catechesis in Trivandrum's fishing communities. This expansion offered Christian communities in Trivandrum a more continuous pastoral presence and integrated them into regional ecclesiastical circuits.²⁶¹

The third breakthrough moment was the Jesuit missionary activities between 1536 and 1544, particularly those collaborating with St Francis Xavier. Though Xavier's most direct work took place on the Fishery Coast further south, the approaches and catechetical strategies he used such as the use of children's catechisms, an emphasis on the Rosary, and support for fishermen and spread fast northward to Trivandrum.²⁶² Jesuit letters show how these practices spread to surrounding fishing villages. This important moment established the pastoral model that would define Trivandrum parishes for the next several decades.²⁶³

The establishment of the Diocese of Cochin in 1558 marked the fourth turning point, bringing Latin Christians in southern Kerala under official episcopal control.²⁶⁴ For the Trivandrum communities, this meant having access to episcopal visitations, canonical faculties, and clergy regularisation. Although Cochin remained geographically distant, its founding insured that Trivandrum's parishes were not isolated, but rather part of a recognised ecclesiastical framework.²⁶⁵

The institutionalisation of parish life in the 1560s, which was characterised by the growth of marital and baptismal registries, the creation of fraternities, and the opening of catechetical schools, was the fifth key moment.²⁶⁶ By integrating Christianity into the ordinary activities of everyday life, these institutions provided strength of the Christian identity. Additionally, they established continuity across generations, enabling the Church to endure even in the absence of missionary activity.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁰ P. Shungoony Menon, *A History of Travancore* (Madras: Higginbotham, 1878), 56–63.

²⁶¹ George Nedungatt, "The Latin Church in India and its Juridical Structures," *The Thomist* 42 (1978): 87–112.

²⁶² Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, 3–90.

²⁶³ John Correia-Afonso, *Jesuit Letters and Indian History* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1969), 89–104.

²⁶⁴ Menachery, *Indian Church History Classics*, 312–316.

²⁶⁵ Mundadan, *Vol. II*, 210–225.

²⁶⁶ Pathil, "Catechesis and Education," 101–120.

²⁶⁷ Boxer, *Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, 118–122.

The Synod of Diamper, held in 1599 under the leadership of Archbishop Menezes of Goa, was the sixth and last key event of the century. The Synod's instructions, which required printed books, consistent catechisms, and stronger episcopal guidance, had an indirect impact on the Latin Church even though their goal was to reform the St. Thomas Christians.²⁶⁸ This strengthened the universality of their traditions and strengthened the bonds between Trivandrum's Catholic communities and the larger Catholic community.

All these key points transformed the Latin Catholic presence in Trivandrum from a weak missionary outpost to a strong ecclesial community. By 1600, the basis for development were solidly in place, encouraging the Church to grow in resilience and breadth throughout the next centuries.

²⁶⁸ Vellian, *Synod of Diamper*, 25–46.

Conclusion

The 16th century marks a decisive and transformative chapter in the history of Christianity in South India, and particularly in Trivandrum. The emergence and growth of the Latin Catholic Church in this region were not merely outcomes of missionary enthusiasm or political conquest; they were the result of a complex convergence of faith, power, culture, and human aspiration. The story of the Church's expansion in Trivandrum between 1500 and 1600 reflects both the triumphs and the tensions of cross-cultural evangelization, the resilience of indigenous communities, and the birth of a faith community that continues to shape Kerala's religious and social life to this day.

Before the arrival of the Portuguese, Trivandrum's religious landscape was distinguished by great tolerance and diversity. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism have long affected the region's philosophical and spiritual imagination, while early Syrian Christians (the St. Thomas Christians) represent an ancient strain of apostolic religion based in local culture and tradition. This multicultural environment had established a difficult balance between devotion and relationship. The monarchs of Venad and Travancore kept the balance by establishing a system of royal patronage that recognised many religious traditions, providing both political stability and cultural diversity.

In this context, Christianity was not uncommon. The early presence of St. Thomas Christians along the Malabar Coast established a distinct Eastern Christian culture, with Semitic liturgy and Indian social organisation. Thus, when the Portuguese arrived, they did not introduce Christianity for the first time; rather, they brought a new form of it, heavily influenced by the Roman liturgy, Latin theology, and the imperial structures of the Portuguese crown. The development of the Latin Catholic Church in Trivandrum must thus be viewed as both a continuation and a rupture: a continuation of the Christian religion that had already existed in Kerala, as well as a rupture in terms of episcopal authority, liturgical form, and social organisation.

Vasco da Gama's entry in Calicut in 1498 marked not just the beginning of a maritime trading age, but also a new spiritual and cultural interaction. Portuguese expansion was driven by the two objectives of commerce and evangelisation. Under the *Padroado Régio* (Royal Patronage), the Portuguese Crown accepted responsibility for missionary activity in the East, forming an indivisible partnership between the cross and

the crown. The Estado da Índia, with administrative and military headquarters at Goa, served as a bridge between the empire and the Church.

This interaction in Trivandrum, as on the Malabar Coast, was both creative and combative. Missionaries aimed to evangelise coastal communities, especially fishermen, who were the first to convert to Latin Christianity. Portuguese political protection aided the Church's growth, as did the social openness of certain marginalised communities, who found spiritual emancipation and social dignity in Christianity. However, this dynamic also resulted in conflict. The imposition of Latin liturgical forms over ancient Syriac traditions strained relations with the St. Thomas Christians, and the Church's partnership with colonial power occasionally alienated indigenous rulers and religious leaders.

However, the first century of Latin Catholic growth in Trivandrum was remarkably adaptable. Missionaries such as the Franciscans and Jesuits not only preached the Gospel, but also learnt local languages, established schools and churches, and incorporated local customs into devotional practices. The resulting combination was not perfect but long-lasting: an Indian Catholicism imbued with both the imprint of Rome and the fragrance of Kerala's soil.

One of the most important parts of this history is the social structure of the new Latin Catholic society. The early converts in Trivandrum were mostly from the coastal fishing castes 'Mukkuvars, Nadars, Izhavas, and Dalits' who had historically been marginalised in Kerala's rigid social hierarchy. For them, conversion to Christianity was more than just a spiritual conviction; it was also a way of social regeneration. The Church provided them with a new identity that transcended caste, a sense of belonging to a global society under God.

However, the promise of equality inside the Church frequently conflicted with societal realities. Despite its universal message, the Latin Church in Kerala quickly reflected some of the caste and class divisions in wider society. According to sociologist E. P. Antony, the Kerala government classified Latin Catholics as "Other Backward Classes" (OBCs), reflecting their socioeconomic marginalisation rather than their spiritual strength. Many Latin Catholic parishes, particularly those in Trivandrum's coastline villages of Vizhinjam, Poonthura, and Pulluvila, became bases of communal solidarity as well as resistance to poverty, illiteracy, and social marginalisation.

The Church's hierarchical structure, inherited from the Roman model, allowed for little lay participation, and foreign prelates dominated ecclesiastical leadership for many years. This affected the community's capacity to organise politically and socially. Nonetheless, indigenous clergy and local leaders began to develop throughout time, spearheading initiatives for education, social welfare, and struggling empowerment. In this way, the Latin Catholic Church in Trivandrum has transformed from a missionary faith to a community seeking self-definition and social justice.

The Synod of Diamper (1599) marked the culmination of the 16th century transformation of Kerala's Christian landscape. Convened under Archbishop Aleixo de Menezes, the Synod sought to bring the diverse Christian communities of Malabar into full communion with the Roman Church. While the event is often remembered for its imposition of Latin forms on the Syrian liturgy and for the suppression of certain local customs, it also represented an attempt to create ecclesial unity and doctrinal coherence in a region long marked by pluralism. For the Latin Catholics of Trivandrum, the Synod provided canonical legitimacy, liturgical stability, and a sense of belonging to the global Catholic Church. At the same time, the Synod represents the uncertainties of cultural contact. It serves as an indication that evangelisation cannot be reduced to uniformity; the Church's universality must embrace difference rather than ignore it. The post-Synodal period saw a steady indigenisation of the Latin Church in Kerala, as local clergy, catechists, and religious began to take on leadership roles and reinterpret the Gospel in their own cultural contexts.

From a sociological and pastoral view, the Latin Catholic community in Trivandrum remains one of Kerala's most vibrant yet socially vulnerable populations. Despite centuries of Christian existence, many Latin Catholics still experience poverty, a lack of education, and social marginalisation. Alcoholism, dowry-related poverty, and gender inequality still exist in many fishing villages. The Church, which is deeply ingrained in many aspects of community life, continues to serve as a source of spiritual strength as well as an instrument for social mobilisation. Parish councils, some associations and charitable institutions continue the work begun by the first missionaries, aiming not only to save souls but also to improve people's lives.

However, its legacy must also be viewed critically. Based on religious infrastructure and the domination of clerical authority have occasionally hampered lay initiative and social improvement. The Latin Catholic Church in Kerala was often

sluggish to address systemic inequities and promote genuine empowerment among the poor. While historical clerical authority centralisation has been effective in guaranteeing unity, it has also hampered creativity and autonomy at the grassroots. Today, however, the rise of educated lay leaders, the dedication of indigenous clergy, and the growing awareness of social justice within Catholic teaching all point to a new sense of mission among Trivandrum's Latin Catholic community.

The growth of the Latin Catholic Church in Trivandrum throughout the 16th century is more than just a colonial footnote in Christian history. It symbolises an important theological moment in which the Gospel faced a new cultural world and found expression in uncharted territory. Despite its limitations, the missionary activity served as an instrument for expressing Christ's global message into the people of the Kerala. The endurance of Church in the face of adversity, ability to inculturate, and commitment to the poor all demonstrate the vitality of a religion that transcends historical contexts.

In a way, the Church's history in Trivandrum demonstrates that evangelisation is more than just the transmission of beliefs; it is the manifestation of the Gospel within a vibrant culture. The Latin Catholic community's story is thus one of transformation—of a people who, despite poverty and prejudice, built a distinct Christian identity based on the sea, the spirit, and the soil.

Here the thesis has shown that the growth of the Latin Catholic Church in Trivandrum (1500–1600) was the product of detailed interactions between East and West, between the colonial and the indigenous, between faith and power. The Portuguese built a structure, but the people of Kerala who gave the Church its soul. What began as a missionary outpost emerged into a strong Church that was integrated into the region's social and cultural fabric. Despite being regarded a "backward class," the Latin Catholics of Trivandrum have stayed at the forefront of Kerala's spiritual and social life, demonstrating the enduring strength of faith in the face of historical change.

Therefore, the history of the Latin Catholic Church in Trivandrum is a chronicle of human interaction, cultural adaptation, and divine grace rather than just a history of establishments and conversions. It serves as a reminder that the faith of common believers whose lives become living gospels in their communities is just as important to the Church's growth as the power of empires. The story that began in the 16th century

continues to this day, as the Latin Church of Trivandrum bears witness to the transforming power of Christ in a pluralistic and ever-changing world.

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