

# THE PORTUGUESE CARTAZ SYSTEM AND THE MARITIME TRADE OF KOLLAM

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Portugal, the pioneer nation in the discovery of new sea routes established commercial contacts with the different spice producing areas of the Eastern countries and derived maximum profit. The king of Portugal issued specific instructions to this effect and provided with all support to the adventurers. The European intellectual movement developed an interest in deepening the understanding of the science connected with the sea and navigation. They were the first to have understood the concept of sea-power and evolved a naval strategy for the effective control of the Indian sea. Kollam was an important maritime trading centre of the Portuguese power in Kerala.

Kollam began to develop as a maritime trading centre from 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The geographical features of the region helped very much for the development of Kollam as an entrepot of Kerala. The principal item procured by the Portuguese was spices and pepper was prominent among them. Though some other goods like coconuts were also procured by them. Besides these products, the native products of Kollam offered for sale were include a type of fish named liu and betelnuts.<sup>i</sup> Pyrard de Laval, the French navigator referred about the sardine fish from Kollam.<sup>ii</sup>

Various commodities like pepper, cinnamon, ginger, clove, mace, nutmegs, many sorts of spices and drugs were exported in the beginning of the sixteenth century by the Portuguese. Pepper formed an essential ingredient in cooking for the wealthier classes as well as for the common people and most important is that it had medicinal use. Fortress and factories were built in different parts of Kerala with the purpose their commercial expansion. The most important for the Portuguese and most humiliating for the Indians was the system of passes or *cartaz*.<sup>iii</sup> The Portuguese, with a view to sparing the vessels introduced an expedient under which those ships that were not to be attacked were required to carry a certificate duly signed by the Portuguese authorities, namely, the royal factor, or the captain of the fortress.

*Cartaz* which is a loan word from the Arabic 'qirtas', meaning paper document, was some sort of license of movement or safe conduct for navigation issued by the Portuguese to native ships, with the exclusive view of showing that these vessels did not belong to the enemy camp.<sup>iv</sup> The ships that did not buy *cartazes* were confiscated along with their cargo, and the people on board were enslaved. Thus under the pretext of checking *cartaz* the Portuguese officials attacked and confiscated the vessels of the Marakkar traders going to the Ottoman trade centres.<sup>v</sup>

A *cartaz* contained reference to the circumstance in which it was given. The name and tonnage of the ship, and age of its captain, the port of embarkation as well as disembarkation, and the approximate date of departure were also indicated in the *cartaz*. Mention was made of the arms and ammunitions carried in the ship and the items

that were prohibited to be transported were also declared. Lastly the names of the writers and of the issuing authority were given along with the date of issue. In fact the Portuguese had aimed at controlling the market by establishing monopoly through the *cartazes*.<sup>vi</sup>

The overseas trade that once flourished well in the Indian Ocean declined during the sixteenth century and it was because of the strict enforcement of the *cartaz* system by the Portuguese. By the implementation of this *cartaz* system the Portuguese controlled the trade conducted by the native as well as the foreign Muslim merchants. Even the merchant vessels holding *cartaz* issued by the Portuguese were under danger of being plundered by the Portuguese.<sup>vii</sup>

The Portuguese tried to introduce certain restrictions on the trade of Malabar coast and claimed supremacy over the Indian Ocean. They set up fortresses and trading factories on the west coast (Goa, Diu, Daman), on the Coromandel coast (Negapattinam, Mylapore, Tranquebar and in Bengal (Hooghly, Dacca, Chittagong). Albuquerque proposed to have factories and forts at Cochin, Cananor and Quilon). The Portuguese possessions were strongly fortified settlements, accessible only by sea.<sup>viii</sup>

It was after the arrival of Alvares Cabral in 1500, the most important decision was taken that to establish a permanent Portuguese factory and settlement. Later Almeida also encouraged the establishment of factory and fortress.<sup>ix</sup> The establishment of the Portuguese fortress in 1505 was a wise decision from the part of Portuguese, because it caused for the emergence of new settlements in the coastal regions. Thus a new settlement began to strike root, a little away from the native Cochin. The king and the governors of the Portuguese India encouraged the unmarried Portuguese male residents to marry the local Indian women in order to increase the population of those living within the sphere of Portuguese culture. Gradually a number of Portuguese factories were created and the Portuguese settled around them.

Affonso de Albuquerque gave more importance on building fortresses and maintaining cordial relationship with Indian states.<sup>x</sup> Gradually in and around the fortresses in these places came up settlements of the Portuguese *casados e maradores* (married settlers). Many of them married local women giving rise to a mixed race. They preferred Muslim and Brahmin ladies, according to Affonso de Albuquerque, were fair in complexion, chaste in morality and reserved in social contacts being shut up in their houses while the others were of a liberated nature.<sup>xi</sup>

Records say that both the King and Affonso de Albuquerque encouraged mixed marriages. Albuquerque encouraged the *casados* to conduct local trade and there were reference for bakers, shoemakers, tavern keepers and tailors. The matrimonial alliances helped the traders to conduct trade with the port of Bengal. During the sixteenth century, the trade began to develop and along with it helped to increase the number of the Portuguese 'casados'. The *casados* are those, family-men especially the Portuguese citizens married to native women. Gradually these *casados* began to develop as a prominent section of the society and formed an important part of the merchant communities in Portuguese Asia. The emergence of *casados* as a bourgeoisie class in the Indian Ocean region played a very important role in restructuring the commercial strategy of the Portuguese.<sup>xii</sup>

Albuquerque aimed at the foundation of a Portuguese empire in the East. For this purpose he gave considerable importance to the erection of forts wherever he found a factory. It is not only for the protection of the maritime trade, but to enable him to dominate the native rulers and to consolidate his power, with the object of coercing them into acknowledging Portugal as a suzerain power.<sup>xiii</sup> Thus the first of the European fortresses on the Indian soil was established in Cochin.<sup>xiv</sup>

The Queen of Kollam wanted a friendly relationship with the Portuguese and invited them. The queen of Kollam agreed that the local merchants would accept *cartazes* from the captain of the fortress as a sign of her willingness to become a vassal of the king of Portugal for the sake of commercial prosperity of her capital town. Albuquerque utilized this opportunity and he opened up trade with Kollam. Thus the Portuguese established a factory at Kollam in January 1504.<sup>xv</sup> But later, in a fight between the Portuguese and the people of Kollam, the factory was destroyed and the captain Antonio de Sao died. In 1515 Lopo Soares De Albergaria succeeded Albuquerque as the Governor and he entered into a treaty with Quilon was made by which the queen agreed to erect the fort of San Thome in the same manner and in the same spot, and to compensate for the death of Antonio de Sao by giving to the Portuguese king 500 bhar of pepper. In the same year about 5000 bullockloads of pepper taken from Kollam via Ariankavu Pass were captured by the factor.<sup>xvi</sup>

Kollam agreed not to export pepper but to sell it only to the Portuguese at the Cochin rates. No dues were to be paid for the use of the port, and the queen agreed not to receive or favour the enemies of Portugal.<sup>xvii</sup> The Queen was asked to treat the Christians with favour<sup>xviii</sup> and the Portuguese also secured permission to convert willing people to Christianity.<sup>xix</sup>

During this time the maritime trade of Kollam began to increase and the king of Travancore wanted to erect a fortress to control its trade. In 1599 the king started constructing a fortress adjacent to the Portuguese fortress of Kollam. But the Portuguese trade also was in a developing stage. They tried to destroy the Travancorean fortress of Kollam. It was this time the Archbishop of Goa visited Kerala in connection with the Synod of Diamper. The Archbishop asked him to demolish the fortress to ensure the safety and security of Portuguese trade. However the Travancorean ruler continued his attempts to control the trade through the fortification of Kollam.

The Portuguese trading system affected the trade and commerce of Malabar coast and it seriously affected the Muslim merchants. As a part of the complete control of trade the Portuguese tried to avoid middlemen.<sup>xx</sup> But it is very difficult for them to control the entire maritime trade of Kerala without the help of local merchants. As the Portuguese found themselves incapable of conducting trade without the help of local people, the King instructed the officials to favour the Christians and the Hindu merchants in preference to the Muslims.<sup>xxi</sup> The local merchants of Malabar were able to maintain their position in business in and among them a new group of merchants other than the Muslims came up. The new policies implemented by the Portuguese authority brought about far reaching effects on the structure of the society in Malabar. Thus the Portuguese policies caused for the economic retrogression of Muslims.<sup>xxii</sup>

The Portuguese began to concentrate on the maritime trade with Kerala, because they realized about the huge profit from the spice trade. The production of commodities increased in proportion to the increasing demand and presumably new areas were brought under cultivation. The Portuguese trade brought more cash into the market. It is interesting that in certain areas the Portuguese factories were located under the local rulers and the indigenous coins were also used in transactions in those factories. During this time of Portuguese commercial development, Kollam had large coins called 'tanga' and small coins called 'panams' both of gold.<sup>xxiii</sup> By sixteenth century, the Kollam-Portuguese trade brought about significant changes in the socio-economic structure of Kollam.

The pepper brought by the Portuguese for export to Portugal was acquired from middlemen at weighing houses and factories in Malabar and Canara and later brought to Goa. The middlemen who brought the dried pepper from the cultivators transported it by cart, oxen or river boat to the markets and they sold this pepper to distributors and exporters. There were independent operators also, but some acted as agents for wealthy coastal merchants. The contractors acquired their stocks either through sending their own agents to buy in the fields, or else directly from the lesser middlemen.<sup>xxiv</sup>

By the end of the sixteenth century there occurred certain changes in the Portuguese trade with Kollam. The Portuguese share of the pepper export and the export of other commodities went down. Kayamkulam and Kollam, which were renowned for cultivation, had re-established their links with Asian merchants and decided to sell their pepper in open markets.

There were some problems between the Portuguese and the Mappila Muslims of Kerala. The Muslims of Kerala had their trade monopoly in Indian Ocean and their trade contacts helped for the development of overseas trade in the different coastal regions of Kerala. The Portuguese had to break down the monopoly of these Muslims in order to establish their trade in Kerala. The Portuguese government gave instructions to the governors and viceroys to encourage Hindu and Christian merchants on the subcontinent of India to disadvantage of the Muslim merchants. They, from the very beginning, also tried to take necessary steps to avoid local traders and enter on direct relations with the kings.

The trade rivalry that developed between the Muslims and the Portuguese marked by acts of inhuman cruelty on the part of Portuguese. The Portuguese in their trade relations with the Kings of Kerala insisted that trade in spices should be their monopoly. Zaynuddin observed if the native ships had not obtained a pass, the Portuguese "seized it, its crew and its cargo".

The arrival of catholic missionaries was an event which was destined to add new dimensions to the history of lower strata of the society in the sixteenth century. Thousands of lower castes were converted to Christianity. References speak that many Muslim men and women were forcefully converted to Christianity.<sup>xxv</sup> Varthema recorded that he found twenty-two Portuguese Christians at Kollam. Barbosa recorded that there are a number of Moors and Christians in the city of Kollam. Many of the natives of Kollam became Christians and there were twelve-

thousand households of Christians. Barbosa refers about the churches in the inland country. Marignoli's reference about the St.Thomas Christians of Kollam also testifies the influence of Christians in that region.

The Portuguese trade contributed very much for the development of the coastal towns of Cochin, Cannanore and Kollam to the detriment of Calicut. The Portuguese government also took steps in educating the children of town residents by opening schools. Such schools were found in the early sixteenth century in Kochi, Kodungallur and Kollam. But the Muslims did not get the opportunity for proper education. They were not considered with the other groups of the society. They remained comparatively uneducated and it caused social and educational backwardness of the people.

However, commercial interests were definitely the prime motivation behind the adventurous navigations undertaken by the Indian and European merchants. But once the contacts with the people of different locations were established it was bound to create interactions and the consequent cultural diffusion.

<sup>i</sup> K.S.Mathew, *Indo-Portuguese Trade and the Fuggers of Germany*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1997,p.4.

<sup>ii</sup> Albert Gray (trans.), *The Voyage of Pyrrard of Laval to the East Indies, The Maldives, The Moluccas and Brazil, Vol.2, Part.2*, Reprint, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi,2000,p.458.

<sup>iii</sup> K.S.Mathew, *Indo Portuguese Trade*, Op.cit., p.70.

<sup>iv</sup> Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India-1500-1663*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2001, p.125.

<sup>v</sup> R.S.Whiteway, *The Rise of Portuguese Power in India*, Asian Educational Services,New Delhi, 1989,p.196.

<sup>vi</sup> Margret Frenze, *From Contact to Conquest, Transition to British Rule in Malabar, 1790-1805*, Oxford University Press,New Delhi, 2003,p.67.

<sup>vii</sup> R.S.Whiteway, Op.cit., p.172.

<sup>viii</sup> Alexander I.Tchitcherov, *India-Changing Economic Structure in the Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1998, p.118.

<sup>ix</sup> R.S.Whiteway, Op.cit., p.110.

<sup>x</sup> Afsal Ahmed, *Indo-Portuguese Trade in the Seventeenth Century (1600-1663)*, Gian Publishing House, New Delhi,1991,p.187.

<sup>xi</sup> K.S.Mathew, *The Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*, pp.215-16.

<sup>xixii</sup> Pius Malekandathil, "The Portuguese Casados and the Intra- Asian Trade: 1500-1663" in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Millennium (61<sup>st</sup>) Session*, Kolkatha, 2000-2001, p.385.

<sup>xiii</sup> Arnold T.Wilson, *The Persian Gulf (An Historical Sketch from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century)*, Routledge,London, 1959 ,p.712.

<sup>xiv</sup> K.S.Mathew and Afsal Ahmad, *Emergence of Cochin in the pre-Industrial Era: (A Study of Portuguese Cochin)*, Pondicherry University, Pondicherry, 1990, p.vi.

<sup>xv</sup> F.C.Danvers, *Report on the Portuguese Records Relating to the East Indies*, Asian Educational Services,New Delhi, 1991, p.3.

<sup>xvi</sup> P.P.Sudhakaran, "Portuguese Relation of the chiefs of Kerala" in P.J. Cheriyan, (ed.), *Perspectives on Kerala History*, Kerala State Gazetteer, Vol.II,Part II, Kerala Gazetteers Department, Trivandrum, 1999, p.209.

<sup>xvii</sup> K.M.Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese*, Voice of India,New Delhi, 1997, pp.95-96.

<sup>xviii</sup> F.C.Danvers, Op.cit., p.9.

<sup>xix</sup> K.K.Kusuman, *A History of Trade and Commerce (1600-1805)*, Mittal, Delhi, p.17.

<sup>xx</sup> Ahsin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade-1740-1800*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1967, p.9.

<sup>xxi</sup> K.S.Mathew, *The Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*, p.210.

<sup>xxii</sup> Rolland Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala*, Orient Longman, Madras, 1992, p.75.

<sup>xxiii</sup> K.S.Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*, p.27.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Afzal Ahmed, OP.cit., p.85.

<sup>xxv</sup> S.M.H.Nainar (trans.), *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin*, Other Books,Calicut, 2006, p.57.