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# MEDIEVAL KERALA

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"To protect the prestige of Valluvanad, hundreds of Chavers, fought in the Mamankam of Thirunavay and attained Veeraswarga. There repose in this martyr's platform the everlasting memories of those great patriots who are shining examples of heroism in the annals of Kerala history".

**T**his is an inscription found in the precincts of the Thirumandhankunnu temple at Angadippuram in Malappuram district. Why was this Mamankam conducted? On the banks of which river is Thirunavay situated Where Mamankam was celebrated?

### **Bloody Mamankams**

Mamankam was a riparian festival. It was held once in 12 years. Kings, nobles, Brahmins, traders, artists etc. from different Desams constituted the overflowing crowd on the sands of Thirunavay. It was an occasion of joy and excitement.

What was the relevance of fighting in Mamankam?

The patronage of Mamankom was known as Raksha purusha sthanam. It was a position

of great honour and prestige. Valluvakonathiri of Valluvanad was the Rakshapurusha of Mamamkam before the Zamorin of Calicut coveted this prestigious position. With his superior military strength it was not difficult for the Zamorin to defeat the Valluvakonathiri and became the Rakshapurusha of Mamamkom. But this was a great blow to the self - respect of the people of Valluvanad. Therefore everytime the Zamorin took his position as Rakshapurusha at the Mamamkom, the Chavers of Valluvanad reached there to fight against him. Death was a certainty but still they came, ready to die, to protect the prestige of their ruler and fighting against the Zamorins forces, they became martyrs.

- \* *Collect the stories and songs on Mamamkam.*
- What were the conventions followed in connection with the Mamamkom?
- When was the last Mamamkom held ?

Collect information and prepare notes.

The Chavers were not from Valluvanad alone.

### 'Win or die'

**The Chavers were fighters who came to be known in Kerala history from 11th century AD. Their primary duty was to assist the king or the naduvazhi in battle. They were also known to have defeated the Portuguese. The Chavers even rendered service as police, volunteer troop and fighting squads.**

### Feuds

The Chaver system might have originated from family feuds. If a person died in an encounter

his relatives nurtured feelings of revenge against the assassins and took revenge on him and his family. The feud lasted for generations.

How did the feud affect the society ?

### Duels to Settle Disputes

Ankam is a fight between two warriors. Each side in a dispute would engage warriors to fight for them. They would fight for them at a fixed place and at an appointed time. The victorious warrior would be declared to have won the dispute. Usually the ankam ended with the death of one of the warriors. Therefore the warriors charged high prices for fights. They were professionally trained fighters. They got training from Kalaris.



*Kalaripayattu*

- \* *Collect ballads of north Kerala. Form yourselves in groups and prepare an 'Edition' titled 'The social life in the ballads of the North'. The study may cover how an ankam was fought, the main characters in these ballads how a duel was fixed, the methods and techniques of the duel, the weapons used, the role of the Naduvazhi, the status of women, feds, the festivals of the time etc.*

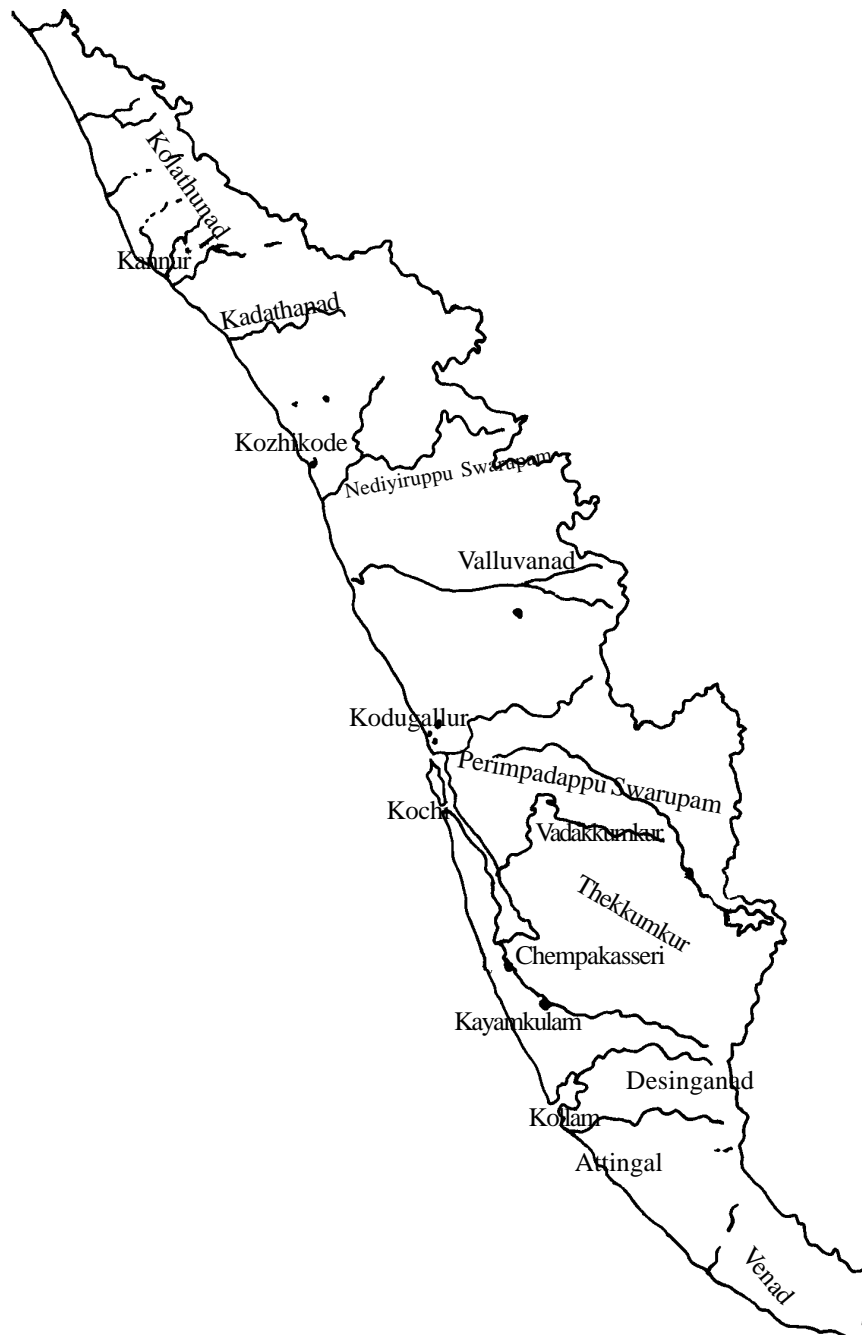
Medieval Kerala was one of feuds, suicide squads, Mamamkom, ankams, duels, kalaris etc.

What were the means of production and distribution in such a society? What were its peculiarities?

Look at the map. Identify the Nadus and Swaroopams in the present districts of Kerala.

## THE AGE OF NADUVAZHIS

We have discussed the reign of the Perumals in the previous class. By the beginning of the 12th century the Perumal rule came to an end. After that, a decentralised system of government under the leadership of Naduvazhis came into force.



Nadus of Medieval Kerala

Prepare a table on the Swaroopams. What are the points to be included in it ?

- The important Swaroopams
- The important rulers
- The important regions
- The centres of power
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### Medieval Settlement Pattern

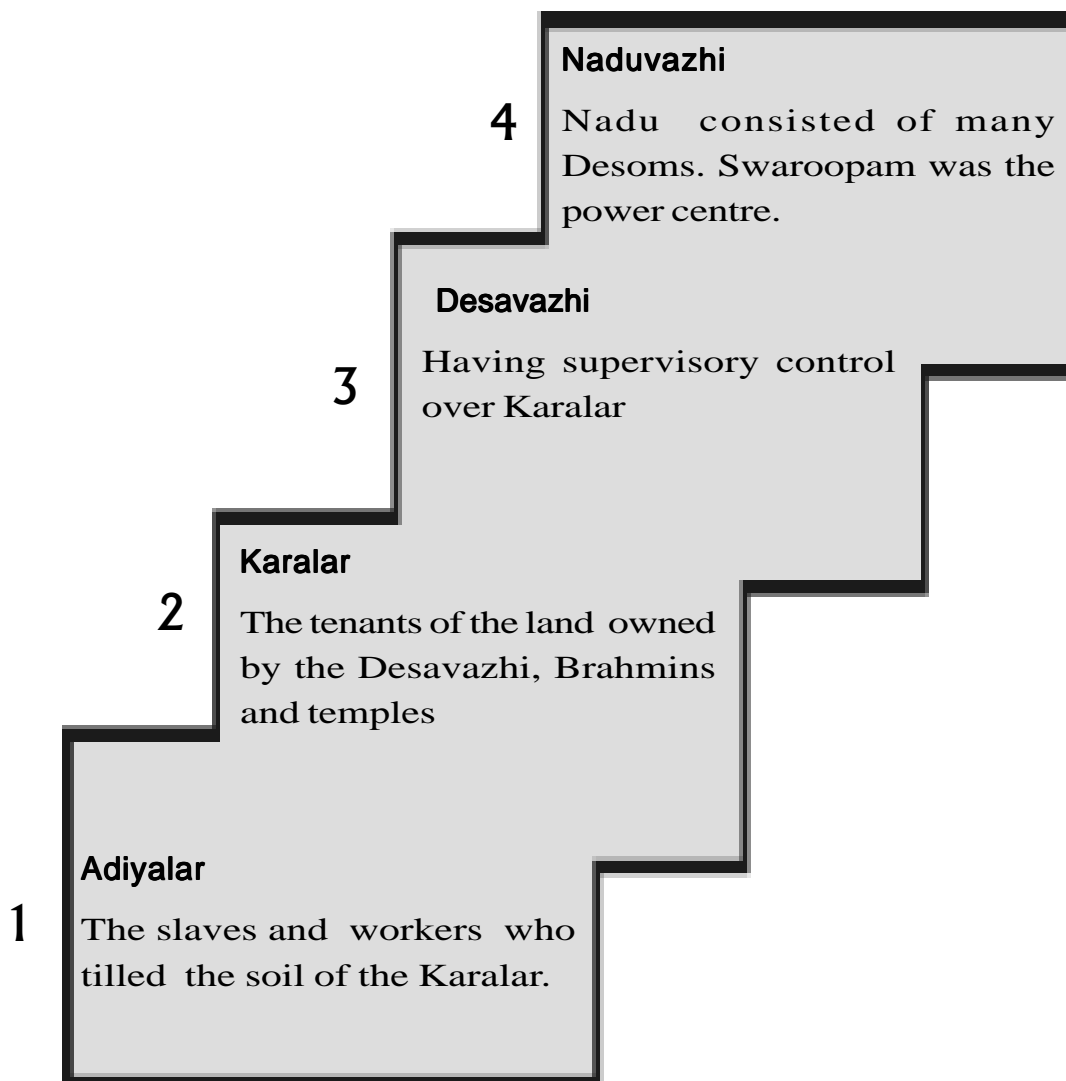
Settlement areas are regions where people opted to settle down. Examine each area of

settlement . It is a cluster of people involved in jobs necessary for the region. These settlements depended on agricultural production. Besides the agricultural labourers, there were blacksmiths with expertise in making metal tools, masons, carpenters etc.

There were also people like astrologers who fixed the time for a variety of new ventures, Apothecaries and men who performed the rituals related to agricultural and household activities.

This was the basic unit of a society.

### POWER HIERARCHY



Another characteristic feature of medieval Kerala society was that their settlement area consisted of a temple complex where the Brahmins had a prominent status. They depended mainly on agricultural production. In the basic units there were people who assisted the priestly class as well. In the centres of royal power and in the centres of trade the royal servants and the traders formed part of the basic unit of society. Is there any connection between these professional groups and the present day castes?

### **Caste system**

Professional classes later evolved into castes. With the changes in society, there were great changes in the structure of the castes also. Until the medieval period such castes as Nayar and Ezhava had no rigid differentiation. With an increase in the number of Naduvazhis and with the growing importance of militarism, a major section of the soldiers turned Nayars. Different professional groups like Ambalavasis, Kammalas became Nayars when they joined the troops.

The impact of the caste system could be seen in the trial of the accused

### **Trial by Ordeal**

#### ***Trial by Water***

The accused will have to swim across a tank full of crocodiles. If he escaped unhurt he will be declared innocent.

#### ***Trial by Fire***

The accused has to dip his fingers in boiling oil or ghee. If he escapes without burns, he will be declared innocent. Otherwise he will be punished.

### ***Trial by Poison***

The accused has to put his hand inside a pot where starving poisonous snakes are kept. If he is not bitten he is declared innocent.

### ***Trial by Balance***

The accused person will be weighed first. Then the charges against him will be written in a palm leaf and then tied to his body. He will be weighed again and if he doesn't weigh more, he will be acquitted.

Now you are familiar with the modes of trial in the medieval period. Among these, trial by balance alone was given to Brahmins. If this was the method of trial, imagine what would be the method of punishments.

### **Unapproachability**

**The hierarchy was regulated in accordance with the interest of the hegemonic classes. There was even a regulation which fixed the distance to be kept by each caste from a Namboothiri. The rule of unapproachability insisted on 12 feet of distances for Kshatriya, 24 for Nayar, 36 for Kammala, 60 for Paraya. As artisans were essential for the construction of temples and royal households and for manufacturing dress and ornaments, they were given a place close to Nayars. Businessmen, traders, craftsmen and Muslims, Christians and Jews who controlled foreign trade were given important status in the society inspite of their religion and caste. The high and the low castes were decided on the basis of the production potential of each caste. The Brahmins had their own justification for all these.**

### ***Chithravadhram***

It was a method of executing a person by piercing his body with an iron rod and fastening his body to a tree. This punishment was meted out only to the lower classes. What other punishments were there?

- Excommunication
- Fine
- Enslavement
- Mutilation of limbs
- Plucking out the eyes
- Trampling by elephant
- Whipping and then applying chilli powder in the wounds and making him stand in the sun.

Of these, Brahmins were given only the first two punishments

Compare these with the punishments of our time.

What is your opinion about giving different punishments to human beings based on their caste?

Discuss this, note down the opinions and suggestions and prepare a short description on "Types of punishment of medieval period - an appraisal"

### ***Sanketams and Changathams***

The Yogams (councils) of the Namboothiri trustees of temples and temple lands and their privileges were together called Sanketam. In the absence of sovereign authority of the government the Sanketams became real rulers. They administered law and justice in their jurisdiction.

The Changatham was a group of warriors who ensured protection and safety to a Desam

and to the Sanketam property. Like the Chavers, Changathams were also suicide squads. They were rewarded with a share from the offerings that were received at the temple. The share was called "Kaaval Panam" (remuneration for guarding) or Rakshabhogam. It was with the military backing of these Changathams that the Brahmins established social and political hegemony.

Were all these commands and directions of the Brahmins acceptable to the others?

### ***Fasting and Repentance***

Disputes arose between temples and Naduvazhis and also between Brahmin and non-Brahmin land lords. At a time when the Brahmins felt that the others might override their norms, they resorted to a technique of fasting as a last resort. Until and unless their requirements were fulfilled or unless the non-Brahmins repented the Brahmins would refuse to take food. Abandoning the served food the Brahmins would indulge in rituals and poojas. In many of the temples there were houses for fasting.

### ***Mannappedi - Pulappedi***

One good example of the hostility between the high caste and low castes was the existence of the dreaded custom in the medieval period - Pulappedi and Mannappedi. According to this custom if a slave like Pulaya, Paraya or Mannan happened to see a high caste woman alone after dusk she would be expelled from her caste. It was enough, if the Mannan or Pulaya threw a stone or a stick at her or called out that he had seen her for the woman to be excommunicated. He could take her with him. This custom prevailed till about 1696. We have discussed the severity of caste system that prevailed in the medieval period.

Devaswam land (Temple land)	Brahmaswam land (Brahmin land)	Cherikkal land/ Pandaravaka land (Royal)	Viruthi Bhoomi (Allotted land)
The land owned by the temple. The temple trustees were the Uralars.	The land owned by the Brahmins	The land owned by the Naduvazhi or the king.	The land granted to the temple kazhakams.

### ***Uralar***

The land was classified into three zones- Kadu (forests) Nadu (the village) and Nagaram (the town). We have seen that the medieval society mainly subsisted on agricultural production. In an agricultural society land was the chief source of production. The ownership of land was the crucial factor. Uralars possessed the right to ownership of land. Look at the table given above.

### **Jenmi system**

The Brahmana Uralars who became owners of Brahmaswam and Devaswam land and the Karalar who had the land on lease together gave shape to the caste -landlord - Naduvazhi system in Kerala. The Karalar were Nayars. This system based on Brahmin-Nayar domination came to be known as Jenmi system. One notable development in the agrarian structure of medieval Kerala was the rise of the intermediary class of the Karalar.

- Why was it that this class grew in importance in so short a time?
- Among the Uralar, Karalar and Paniyalar which was the section that was subjected to maximum exploitation?
- Which class gained most?
- How did they gain?

- Was this system a boon or bane to the agrarian sector?
- How did the Jenmi system come to an end?
- Discuss and note down the ideas that come up in the discussion and include them in your Enquiry Notes.

### **Land Relations**

Between the 12th and the 15th centuries the number of the Thalakkudiyans or Karalar who were the intermediaries increased. By extending the arable land and increasing income from the land, they confirmed their rights on the land. For this money was needed. At the same time, the hereditary landlords (Uralars) tried to perpetuate their birth rights on the land Loan land mortgage, interest etc. came into vogue. Food production extended to new areas. In order to raise the income of the intermediaries and Uralars, the work load of the Paniyalar who were directly involved in food production, was increased. The work load of the labourers was increased and the lease money was raised without causing any reduction in the surplus production.

How was the surplus exchanged?

Keeping a portion for food and seeds the balance was exchanged to meet the daily needs.

## Local Trade

Exchange of commodities was necessary to meet daily needs, as all things could not be produced in one Desam. An example was that in the coastal area where fish and salt alone were available. For such exchange, evening markets and weekly markets came into existence. These markets later developed into business centres and markets of the medieval period. In addition to articles of daily use, luxury items also reached the markets.

People from different Desams speaking different languages and wearing different costumes reached these business centres and markets.

In the last class we discussed the merchant guilds such as Anchuvannam, Manigramam, Valanchiyar etc.

## Long Distance Trade

In the medieval period Kerala had trade contacts with people outside this land. Trade between Tamilnadu and Kerala was conducted by Tamil Brahmins. They brought rice, chilli, cotton, silk and textiles to Kerala and took pepper and other spices from here. Traders from Kerala could be seen in the marketing centres of South India.

Many products from North India were available in the markets of our region. If we rely on the data supplied by the Champu Kavyas we can see that merchants from Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Andhra, Kalinga, Malawa and Vanga (Bengal) had reached the markets of Kerala.

## Maritime Trade

In the Medieval period, there existed trade relations between Kerala and China. Spices like

pepper and cardamom, products like coconut, arecanut and teakwood were in great demand in China. Chinese vessels brought Chinese silk, ceramics, copperware, mercury, zinc, lead etc to Kerala. Till the arrival of the Portuguese in the 15th century the Arabs had conducted trade with Kerala. They took spices like pepper, ginger, cardamom, and cinnamon, herbs, sandal etc. from here. With the coming of the Portuguese, trade with these two countries began to decline.

How did the long distance trade and maritime trade benefit Kerala?

The rule of the Abbasid Khalif which extended for 1400 years was a period of peace. This peaceful atmosphere was very favourable for trade through their capital city of Baghdad. Trade brought prosperity to the Muslims. Infatuated by the luxuries of the East the wealthy Arabs reached the Kerala coast crossing the seas. The hospitality of the Zamorins of Calicut delighted the Arabs, and Kozhikode grew into a great trading centre. Through this Arab trade, the kingdom of the Zamorins also attained great prosperity. The growth of Calicut into an extensive kingdom was due to this assistance from the Arabs. The port officer of the Zamorin (Shah Bandar) was a Muslim. The maritime trade with Arabs also helped in maintaining religious harmony in Malabar.

Southern Kollam, Kodungalloor and Pantalayanikollam (Koyilandi) also grew into port towns and trading centres in this way. Which were the coastal areas where these foreign traders reached?

- \* *Collect details about the trading activities in medieval Kerala, and prepare a Bulletin named "Business News of Medieval Times"*

- \* *Mark the medieval trading centres in the map of Kerala*

Recollect the details of the literature and arts of medieval Kerala discussed in the 8th standard.

## ARRIVAL OF THE FOREIGNERS

Why did the Portuguese come to Kerala?

In 1498 the Zamorin welcomes Vasco da Gama, grants permission to trade from Calicut. As the Zamorin refused to grant certain trade privileges Gama quarrels with the Zamorin and leaves.

In 1500 Portuguese arrive at Calicut under Cabral, confront the Arab traders there, leave for Cochin, obtain trading rights from the Raja of Cochin.

In 1502, Vasco da Gama lands at Cannanore on his second trip to the East, obtains permission for trade from the Kolathiri. In October he arrives at Calicut and demands that the Muslim traders should be ordered out of the port. When the Zamorin refuses to comply with this, he turns hostile. In November, arrives at Cochin and signs trade agreement.

In 1503, war breaks out between the Zamorin and the Raja of Cochin because of the alliance of the latter with the Portuguese. Strong naval force under Albuquerque arrives to help Cochin. The construction of the first European fort in India begins.

Collect more details and complete this chart

What were the circumstances that gave an opportunity to the Portuguese to capture power here? Find this out from the chart.

### Kunjali Marakkar

The naval forces under Kunjali Marakkar were the real strength of the Zamorin. They made lightning attacks on the Portuguese ships armed with guns and cannons, sailing in small country boats, hit them and fled out of sight. Recruitment to this naval force was done after taking an oath in the name of religion. The Kunjalis were a real terror to the Portuguese but the last of the Kunjalis, Kunjali IV, was executed by the Portuguese in Goa. His body was cut to pieces and was exhibited at different places. His head was salted and was sent to Kannur. The fall of the Kunjalis paved the way for the fall of the Zamorin also.

Who were the naval commanders of the Zamorins posing a headache to the Portuguese?

### Religious policy

The Portuguese were Latin Catholics who followed a very orthodox religious policy here. The chief activity of the Jesuit missionaries who were brought to Kerala by the Portuguese was to convert the majority of the Syrian Christians to Latin Catholic church.

### Synod of Diamper

The Udayamperur Sunnahadose of 1599 was the most important attempt of the Portuguese in Kerala to Latinise the Christian church. More than 800 men including priests participated in it. This assembly which was convened purely for enforcing their religious hegemony did not have the permission of the

Pope. After the synod, there arose two churches among the Kerala Christians - the Syrian and Latin.

### **Oath of the Coonan Cross**

This was a revolt in protest against the enforcing of religious domination attempted at Udyamperur synod. It took place in 1653 and is known as Coonan Cross Oath. In accordance with the request of the Syrian Christians of Kerala, the Patriarch of Babylon sent a Syrian priest to Kerala but soon news spread that this priest was caught and executed by the Portuguese. Enraged at this, thousands of Syrian Christians assembled near the historic church at Mattancheri, and touching at the old cross there (a bend one) they took a pledge that in future they would not obey the Arch Bishop. This marked a turning point in the history of the Syrian Christian church of Kerala. The rift in the Christian church in Kerala became a reality.

What was the religious policy of the Portuguese? How did forcible conversion pave

way for the fall of Portuguese power? In what way did the arrival of other European powers to Kerala adversely affect the Portuguese? Find out more about how Portuguese power was swept out of this land and add to your Enquiry Note?

### **Effects of Portuguese Contact**

One contribution of the Portuguese was the 'Chavittu Natakam. What other results could you find out ?

- Political disunity of Kerala was confirmed and this made it easier for the other European powers to enter Kerala.
- The age old trade contact with the Arab countries came to an end. European warfare, weapons and gun powder were introduced into Kerala.
- Scientific techniques of cultivation were introduced. Cashewnut, tobacco, custard apple, guava, pappaya etc. came to be cultivated in Kerala.



*Chavittunadakam*

Find out the other contributions of the Portuguese and add to Enquiry Note.

**Dutch Period : Look at the Time Line given below**

- |      |   |  |
|------|---|--|
| 1604 | - | The Dutch period in Kerala History began, with the representation of the Dutch East India Company signing an agreement with the Zamorin. |
| 1642 | - | The construction of a factory at Purakkad began.   |
| 1658 | - | The Dutch arrived in Kerala and formed a friendly alliance with the Zamorins, against the Portuguese.                                    |
| 1662 | - | The Portuguese force was defeated by the combined forces of the Dutch and the Zamorins.  |
| 1663 | - | The Portuguese were routed out of Kerala.  |

Collect more information about the Dutch period in Kerala history. With the battle of Colachel the Dutch power in Kerala began to decline. What were the contributions of the Dutch?

- They introduced scientific methods of cultivation which brought about notable changes in the economy.
- New industries like salt manufacturing and dyeing were started.
- Set up orphanages.
- Contributed a number of words to Malayalam language.
- Through the monumental work "Hortus Malabaricus" they gave the world authentic studies on medicinal herbs

Who were the other foreigners to reach Kerala, after the Dutch.

Examine the reasons which brought Kerala under foreign rule. How much our disunity contributed to them. Also prepare a short description on the impact of foreign rule on Kerala society.

### Project

Making use of the following two chapters you have to prepare a project on the land relations of Kerala. What information are to be collected for the project from this chapter?

- Ownership of land
- Landlordism (Jenmi system)
- Land relations of medieval period
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### Summary

- Medieval Kerala was divided into Nadus.
- Absence of centralised government. Several layers of power structure
- These Nadus always fought among themselves and problems were solved through physical force.
- Artisanal groups evolved into castes. Brahmin domination existed.
- Low caste people were subjected to exploitation in all walks of life.
- Landlordism existed in medieval period.
- Surplus production paved the way for local and distant maritime trade.

- Spices attracted the Europeans. Mutually fighting Kerala rulers, gave opportunity for them to gain foothold here.
- Foreign contact led to changes in the cultural, artistic, social, economic, agricultural and educational fields.
- In what way did the Coonan Cross Oath become a turning point in the history of the Syrian Christian society of Kerala ?
- Caste system of medieval period. What are the points to be included ?

### Questions

- Why was Ankam conducted in medieval Kerala ?
- What was the chief function of the Kalaris in medieval Kerala ?
- What do you mean by Kutippaka ?
- What is the ostensible caste discrimination in the Trial by Ordeal
- The way the caste system evolved
- Unapproachability
- Discrimination followed in the systems of punishment
- Brahmin domination, Sanketam, Changatham, Fasting
- Discrimination in the field of employment.

