

# A VERNACULAR/HISTORIC POCKET IN A METROPOLIS

product design special project

by

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## APPROVAL SHEET

The Product Design Special Project entitled 'A Vernacular/Historic Pocket in a Metropolis' by Asok Abraham George is hereby approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Design Degree in Industrial Design.

Guide

*M. Abraham*

Date

*July 8th 06*

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**ASOK ABRAHAM GEORGE**

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## CONTENTS

### INTRODUCTION

### KERALA - Unique Urbanisation

### FORT COCHIN - An Invaluable Book of History

### FORT COCHIN - A Brief History

### FORT COCHIN TODAY

### THE PEOPLE OF FORT COCHIN

- The Anglo Indians
- The Christians
- The Muslims
- The Hindus

### FORT COCHIN - What the Future may Hold

## INTRODUCTION

The underlying theme of this project is Ethnicity and Modernisation. The task was to identify a vernacular and historical pocket in a metropolis and study its origin and growth, its religious and cultural rooting, as well as the changes due to the onslaught of modernisation and how traditional culture has endured or adapted itself to the present times. The study included that of the place - its sights, smells, images, pulses, architecture, etc. as well as its people - their needs, feelings, desires and fears. The vernacular pocket and its relationship with the city as a whole, the cross cultural influence and possible conflicts and clashes between them was looked into.

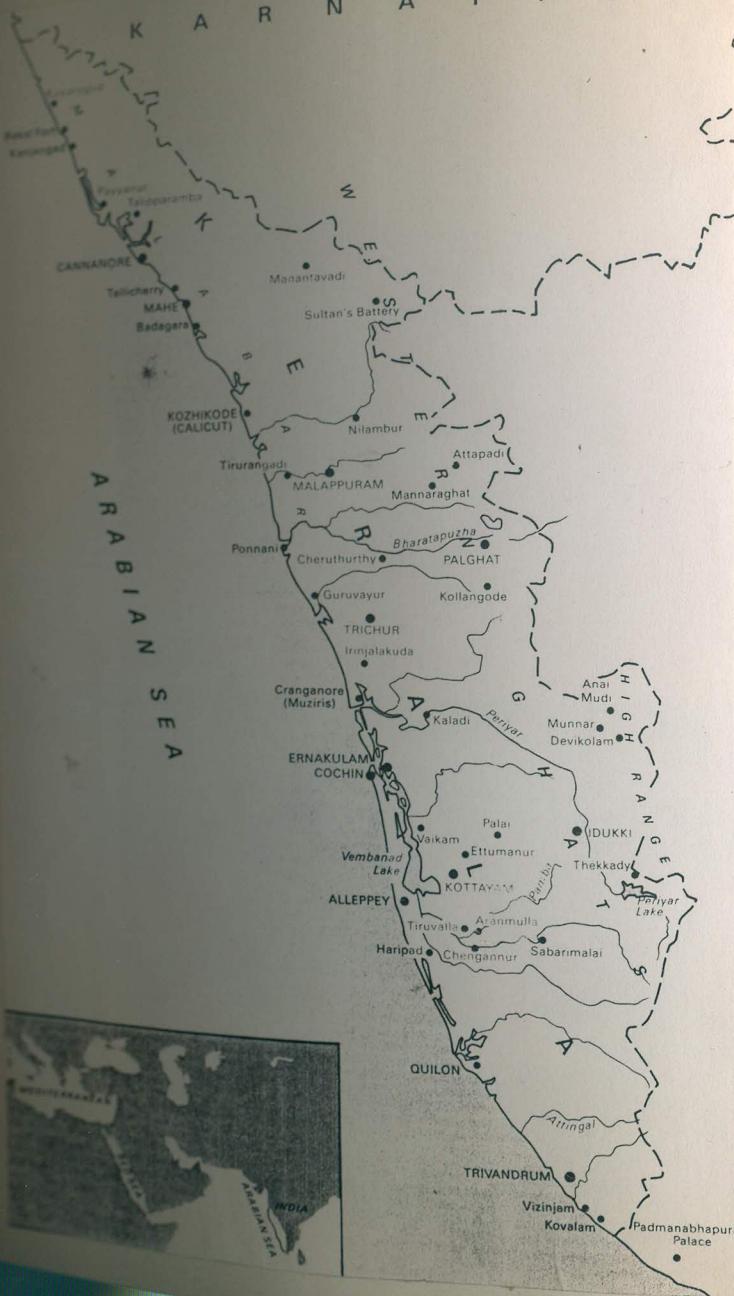
The vernacular/historical pocket chosen for the project is the ancient township of Fort Cochin, once a major trading centre, but now just a small pocket in the metropolitan city of Cochin, the commercial capital of Kerala. This unique urban settlement was chosen because of the radical changes that has taken place in its history, and also because of the component of plurality or the existence of multi-ethnic groups that form its population. Unlike most of the vernacular pockets that exist in other cities like Bombay, this pocket is not inhabited by a single community, but by different people, with different religious and cultural identities.

The study tries to find if a common denominator exists among all these groups, something which makes it possible to collectively identify the people of this area. Due to the limitation of time, the study was restricted to the four main communities of the area, namely - the Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Anglo-Indian communities. Other minority communities which exist in the area such as Gujaratis, Konkanis, Jews, Jains etc. have not been included. Most of these communities are settled in Mattancherry, another historic pocket adjacent to Fort Cochin.

The study includes the documentation of people, places, objects, phenomena, activities, rituals, festivals, streets, buildings etc. A brief outline on the unique urbanisation in Kerala, and the differences it has with urbanisation in the rest of India is included in the study. A brief write-up on the history and the present scene in Cochin is also included.

The study has not ended with this report. As a part of four similar projects undertaken at the same time at different places, the study has sparked off a quest within ourselves, a thought for human values, and a hope that we shall not only become good designers, but more importantly, better human beings.

## KERALA - UNIQUE URBANISATION



Unlike North India, where heritage evolved from the waves of migrants who entered the Indian Plain through the northern passes, from Aryan times to Mogul time, Kerala has been more or less unaffected by such disturbances and invasions. Kerala's colour is green, while that of the Indian Plain and Deccan Plateau is a sun-baked brown. Unlike the Plain and the Plateau which are dotted with ruins of forts, palaces, tombs and Moguls and Afghan monuments, which suggest the passage of a passionate and violent past, Kerala has little dust, few ruins and magnificent monuments.

Kerala has a very high quality of life. Even a modest urban wage-earner can manage to own a house and a plot of land. The countryside weaves in and out of each town, and it is the only Indian state where there is an equitable relationship between rural and urban life. The towns of Kerala do not have the poverty or industrial blight of the big Indian cities. Since Kerala occupies only 1% of the area of India but supports 4% of the total population, it has a very high population density. The average population density is 655 persons/sq.km and in parts of the coastal regions of Southern Kerala density shoots up to 1,500 persons per sq. km. making its country side one of the most crowded in the world.

The coastal stretch from Trivandrum to Cochin is like one long street, with an almost continuous urban/rural mix. It is difficult to make out where one city ends, and the other begins, as well as where urbanisation ends and the rural settlements begin.

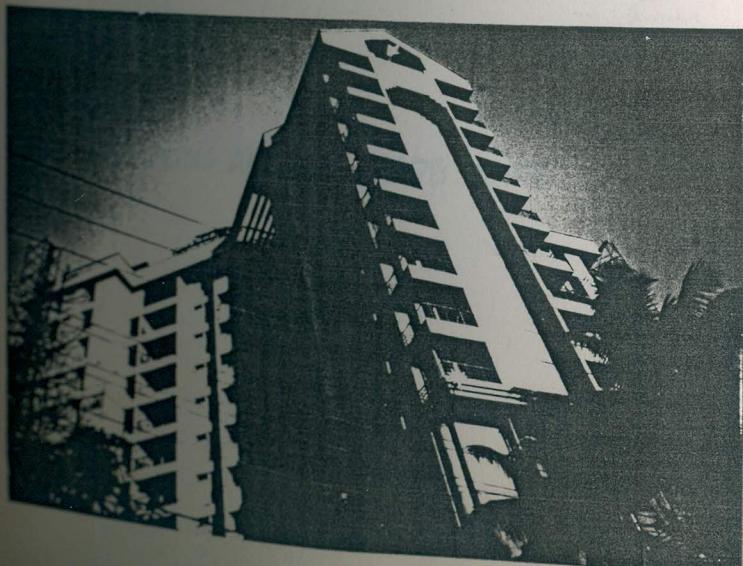
Kerala has the country's highest literacy rate and more than 40% of its budget is spent on education. Even though per capita income is below the national average there is no desperate poverty in Kerala, because of more equitably divided income. The lack of jobs for the large educated and skilled work force has led to many Keralites to take up jobs abroad, especially in the Gulf. This has added to the prosperity in the state, and drastic changes in living conditions. Keralites do not invest much in business or industry and thus investment is mainly in property or in buildings, as a result of which land

prices are soaring and urbanisation is spreading.

Malayalees are a frugal people with a simple lifestyle. On the street it is difficult to tell the rich from the poor. They combine modesty with great pride. They are however known to spend heavily on food, liquor and clothing as well as on the education of their younger ones. This priority of giving good education to children has led to a large number of families having members living apart or whole families shifting and settling in the urban areas, thereby adding to its growth.

The state has more than half of India's Christian population, and the Muslim community accounts for 20% of the state's population. Christianity came to Kerala through St. Thomas as early as AD 52 and through Cana Thomas from Syria in AD 345. Islam reached Kerala through trade with the Arabs unlike the north, where it was established mostly through conquest. Therefore there is much co-operation among Kerala's different communities.

Kerala has a coast line of 590 kms and most of its urban settlements are along this coast. The high population density here has caused the growth the urbanisation to an extent that towns and cities almost run into each other, and a continuous urban strip has almost been created. Away from the coast, the population is less dense, and there is more of rural settlements. The central part of the state is mainly agricultural and on the East are the hills. Kerala thus has a mix of dense green tropical forests, sunny beaches and flat paddy fields.



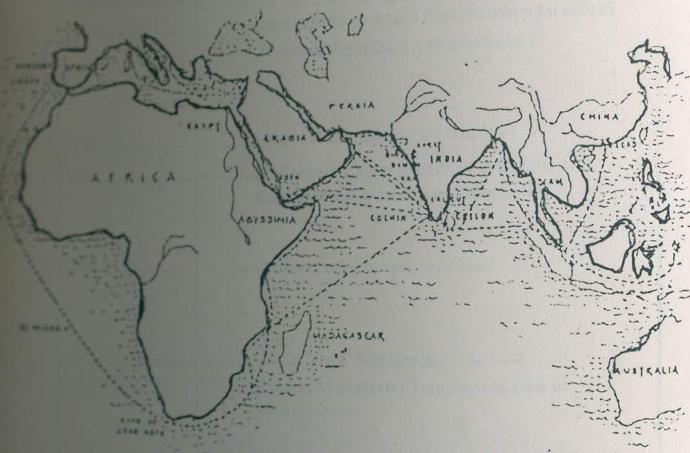
## FORT COCHIN - An invaluable book of history

Cochin, over 600 years old, has a unique place in World History. A great flood in 1341 turned Cochin into a natural harbour and Cranganore a trading place since ancient times in Northern Kerala was silted up in the same flood, causing trade to shift to Cochin or Kochazhi ( the small sea).

Ancient Greeks, Phoenicians, Egyptians, Persians, Chinese, Romans and Arabs came to Kerala for spices. The Arabs and Chinese have left their influences in the lives of the people of Cochin, and even today jars, pans and parasols are known as China Bharani, China Chatti and China Khuda. Religions also came through maritime routes. St. Thomas brought Christianity in AD 52 and the Jews came in AD 70. Only 7 Jewish families remain, and they too intend to leave for Israel.

Cochin was once inhabited by a wide variety of people, who played an active part in the historical process of its development, and Cochin remains to some extent an unusual assemblage of historic building typologies, social systems, economic processes, religious institutions and pre-industrial naval technologies. Fourteen different languages were spoken in Cochin at one time, reflecting the heterogeneity of the settlement.

In 1404, Perumpadappu Swaroopam, a King from the vicinity of Cranganore moved his capital to Mattancherry, another ancient settlement along the backwaters of Kochazhi. In 1500 AD the Portuguese after failing to get a hold on Kozhikode/Calicut arrived in Mattancherry marking the beginning of European colonisation. Subsequent domination by the Dutch and the British pushed the local King to Ernakulam, creating a three settlement conglomerate of Mattancherry, Fort Cochin and Ernakulam. Now these are three administrative zones.



MAP SHOWING ANCIENT TRADE ROUTE.

## FORT COCHIN - A Brief History

### The Portuguese Period (1502 - 1665)

1500	1st Portuguese Fort (Manuel Kota) was built
1503	St. Cruz Church was rebuilt in brick & mortar
1505	Jews from Cranganore migrate to Sanda Cochin
1510	St. Francis' Church was reconstructed
1511	St. Antonio Monastery of St. Franciscans was constructed (present Fort Cochin post office)
1522	Konkanis from Goa arrive in Kerala
1523	Larger Portuguese Fort was built
1542	St. Francis Xavier preached in Cochin and stayed at the San Antonio monastery
1565	Mattancherry palace was built
1568	White Jews' Synagogue was built
1570	Shanta Mahalaxmi Temple was built in Mattancherry
1572	Tirumala Devaswam Temple was built in Mattancherry

The King of Portugal, allured by the possibility of huge profits from sea-trade with India, decided to open a new sea -route and in 1498 Vasco da Gama landed in Calicut. But the Samorin who ruled Calicut where unwilling to start trade with the Europeans and so in 1500 the Portuguese shifted to Cochin. In 1502 they were granted permission to build a fort, called Fort Manuel, to safe guard the interests of their factory in return for service rendered in the battle with the Samorin. This was the earliest European Fort to be built in India. It grew into a flourishing town, along with Mattancherry, attracting traders from all over the world, including the Jews who shifted here from Cranganore in 1565, and the Konkanis . The Portuguese built many convents (including the St. Francis Church in 1506), and converted many people of the Coromandel Coast. Even those who had been practicing Christianity since its arrival in 52 AD were forced to accept the Latin rite. A few who strongly opposed this conversion, managed to survive and continue to practice Christianity in their own unique way ( the Orthodox Syrian rite). But even today, the majority of the local Christians of Cochin are descendants of Portuguese converts and practice the Latin rite.

The Portuguese also allowed mixed marriages to create a loyal local population, and it is the descendants of these early mixed marriages whom we know today as the 'Anglo-Indians' of Fort Cochin. Strong Portuguese influence exists even today in Fort Cochin and in Kerala as a whole , with a large Catholic community, Portuguese names and even Portuguese words in the Malayalam language.

By the 17th century Portugal lost its monopoly of eastern trade, due to the increasing power of the Moguls on land and the English and Dutch at sea. The Dutch VOC (East India Company) made an attempt to capture Cochin in 1662 and succeeded in 1663.

## Dutch Period ( 1663 - 1795)

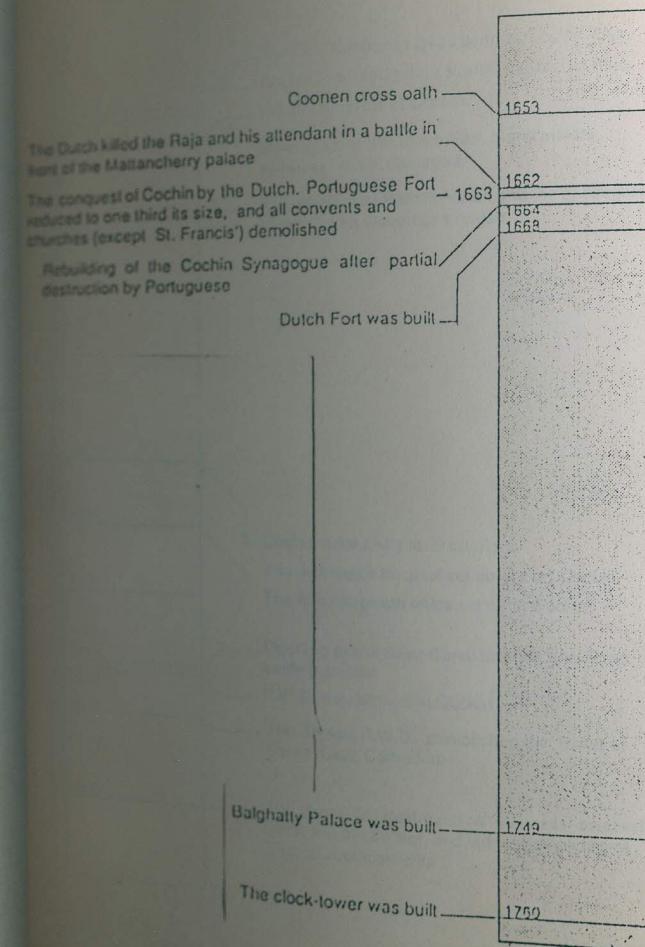
The Dutch reduced the Portuguese Fort to 1/3rd its size. They built 12 to 15 ft. high walls with bastions, surrounded by cleared up areas. The famous Library which lay beyond the new boundary was also destroyed. The Dutch destroyed most convents and churches (only the St. Francis Church was retained) and unlike the Portuguese, did not build any great monuments. Most of their buildings were a compromise between the Dutch vernacular architecture and locally available materials and techniques.

The Dutch renovated the Raja's Palace in Mattancherry, rebuilt the Synagogue, built the Bolghatty Palace and many other country houses along the backwaters. They encouraged plantation (especially that of coconut).

## British Period (1795 - 1947)

By the 1770s Dutch power had declined due to the Napoleon forces in Europe, which had occupied Holland and the British easily captured Cochin in 1795.

In 1814, the town was finally ceded to the British, who had already blown up the fortifications of Fort Cochin. At the site of these fortification they built large bungalows. In the meantime, the influence of Cochin as a harbour had become less important, losing to ports in the North, although it remained as a stopover to the Far East. In 1840 the ruler of Cochin shifted to Ernakulam in the mainland. In 1869 with the Suez Canal being opened and with the change from sail to steam, Cochin became a major coaling station, but the shallow waters of the harbour prevented its growth and harbours in Madras and Colombo became more important. In 1920 the harbour was dredged and Willington Island was created by Sir Robert Bristow. In 1930, two bridges were built to connect Ernakulam to Cochin. In 1902, rail had connected



Ernakulam with the rest of the country and once again Cochin became an important trading place for independent India.

Tiling of the synagogue with tiles from Canton (China)

Shaktan Tampuran takes over as Cochin Raja  
Anchal (postal) system started by Cochin Raja

British conquest of Cochin

Blowing up of the Dutch Fort. Many private buildings were damaged

The rebellion of Palith Achan and the destruction of the Dutch Governor's house

Cochin ruler shifts to Ernakulam

The first major hospital set up at Fort Cochin  
The first telegraph office set up in Cochin

Opening of the Suez Canal turned Cochin into a coaling station

P.W.D. established in Cochin

The British P.W.D. demolished the Tower of Santa Cruz Cathedral.

The great fire destroyed all business establishments along the backwater, and led to the building of 'Pucca' replacements

## Indian Period ( from 1947)

The city of Cochin now occupies an area of 149 sq.km. and has a population of 11,20,000 and is the main industrial region in Kerala. After independence, Ernakulam was given priority for development, and it soon grew into the central business and administrative area, with Willington Island taking over all of main shipping activity. By establishing the Southern Naval Command and building the Cochin shipyard, the Government of India added to the metropolitan nature of Cochin, which is today one of India's fastest growing cities, and also one of the most prosperous. Currently there are plans to turn it into a container - transshipment place, there by giving back to Cochin the importance it held in the 16th and 17th century.

Ernakulam Shorawar railway opened	1902
Public health department set up	1909
Ernakulam municipality set up	1910
Mattancherry municipality set up	1912
Dredging of Cochin Port & formation of Willington Island.	1920
Formation of a Legislative Council of elected majority	1925
Protected water-supply provided. Also, two Cochin-Ernakulam bridges built	1930
Major road & rail connections introduced	1940
	1947

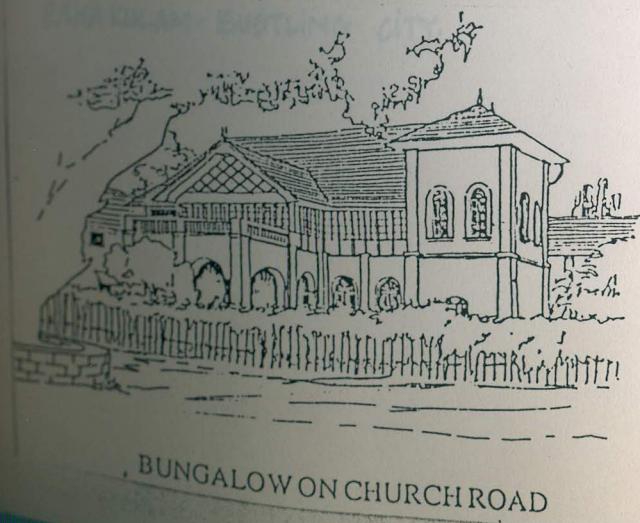
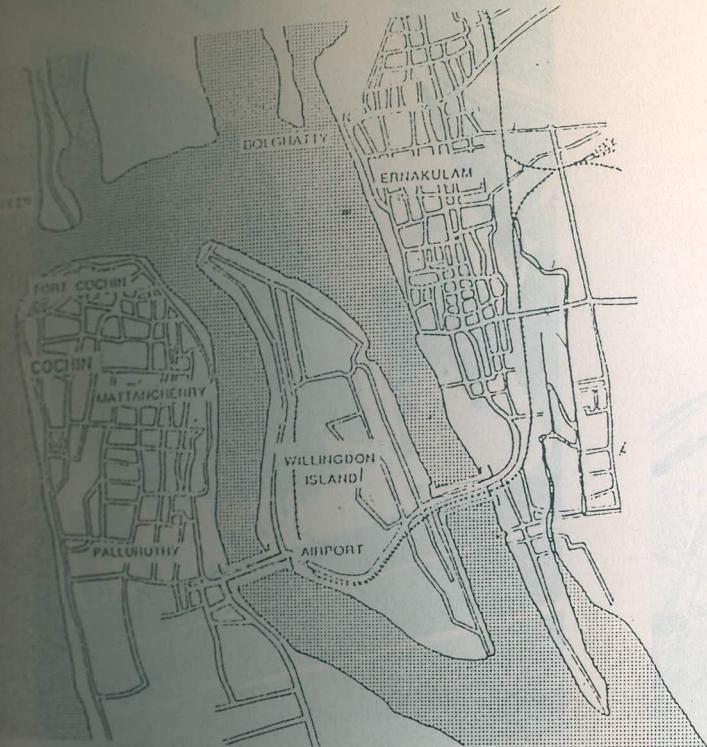
## FORT COCHIN TODAY

Since Fort Cochin was the seat of the colonial administration and residence, it was not given much importance after independence. Hence all administrative and economic infrastructure shifted over to Ernakulam. This shift has led to the old centre, which has always had a rich mix of cultures, to degrade into a secondary suburb and is now in a bad physical condition.

### Fort Cochin and Ernakulam - Contrasting Characters

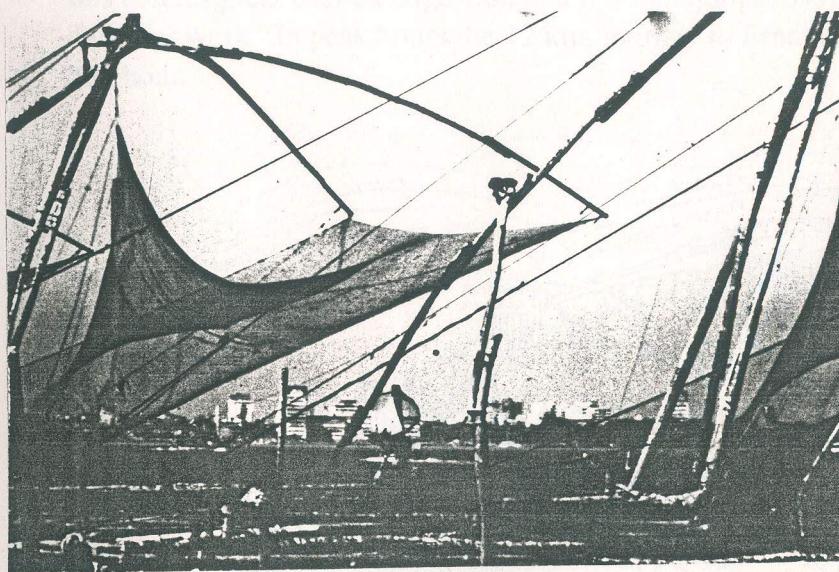
While Ernakulam is the typical prosperous Indian metropolis - with high rise buildings, traffic congestion and pollution, the old Fort area has remained more or less unaffected. Lower land prices have led to an attempt by builders to put-up large apartment blocks by demolishing the old structures which exist here. But this has been more or less halted after the old Fort was declared a heritage zone in 1989, and INTACH has started a heritage zone demonstration project in this area. But this attempt to conserve what remains has more or less turned this once great settlement into a 'living' museum - a bleak reminder of our cultural roots and a component to attract foreign tourists.

The numerous old factories which line the backwaters are now shut down, the streets virtually empty, with little reminders of the thousands of workers who used to walk down them daily. Still, it was the development of Ernakulam as the main city, which first resulted in the collapse of the economic infrastructure of Fort Cochin and which led to isolation that allowed Fort Cochin to keep a large part of its historical quality. But will the existence of a number of historic buildings and street structures be enough to preserve the strong roots of culture and heritage that exist here ?



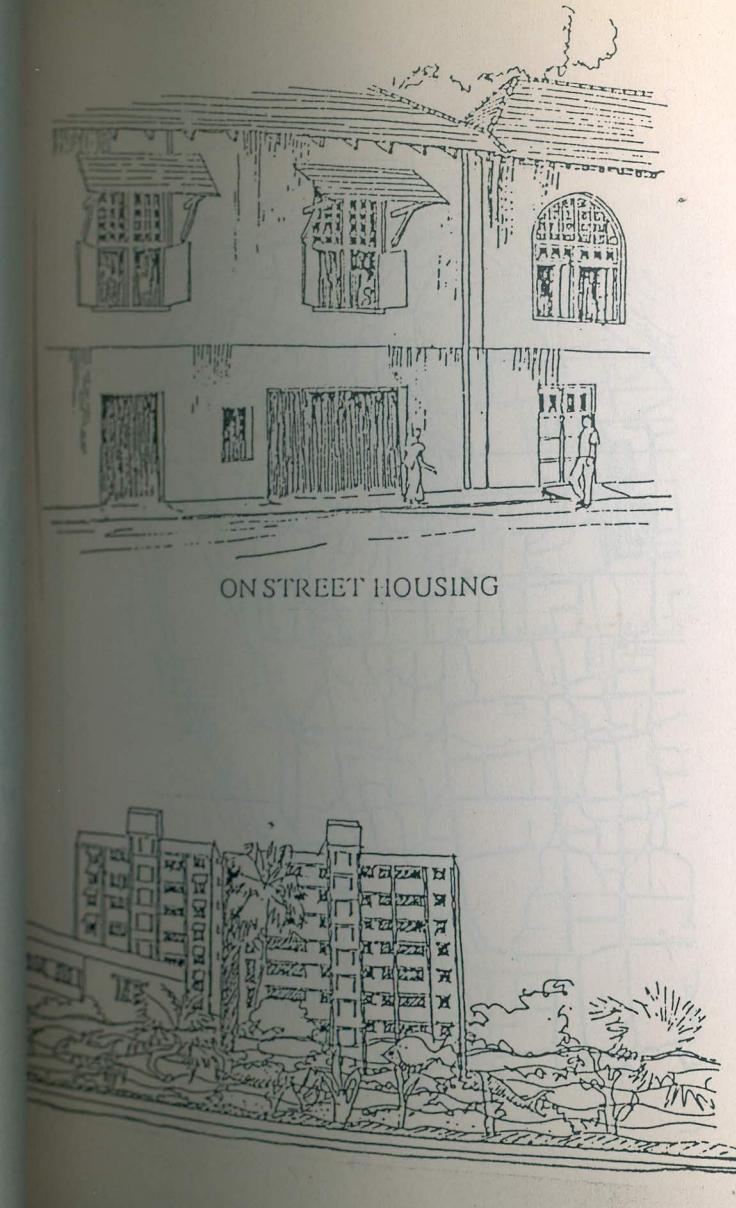


ERNAKULAM - BUSTLING CITY.



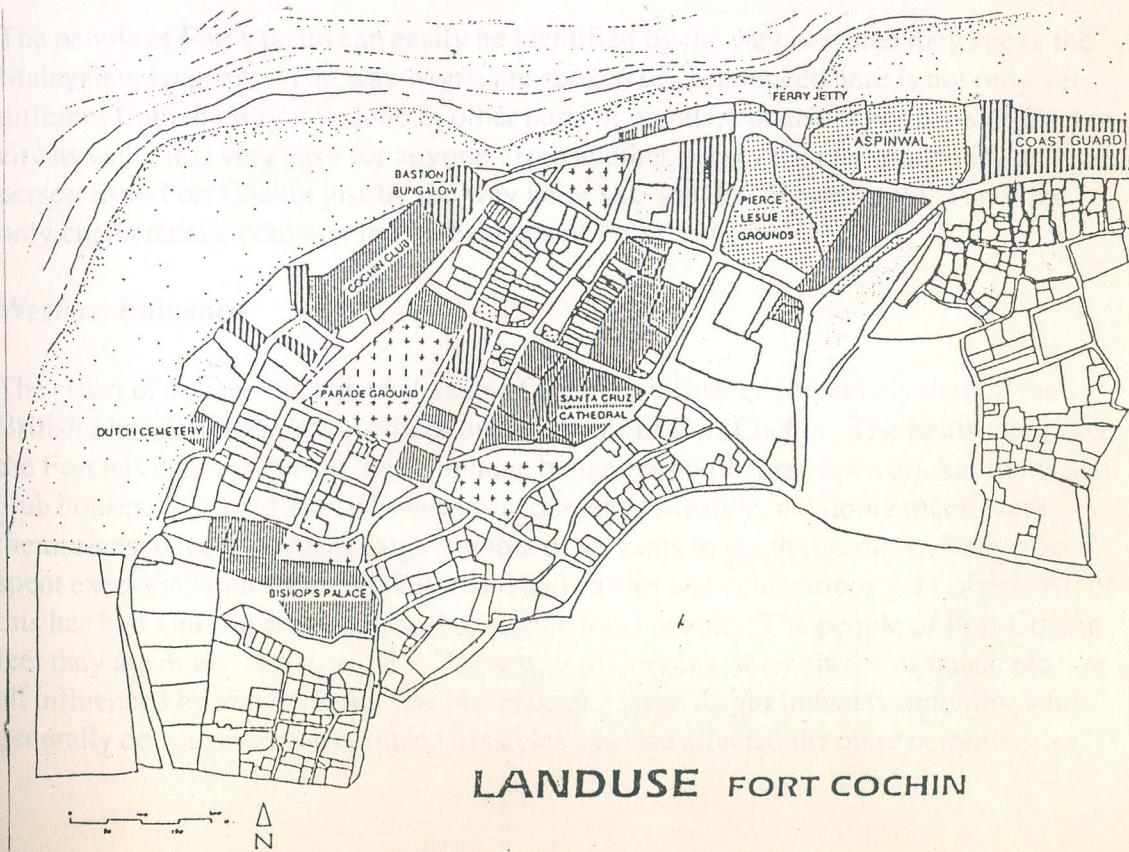
400 YR. OLD CHINESE FISHING NETS. OF FORT COCHIN.





The rising land prices and increasing traffic problems in Ernakulam has led to an influx of commuters to settle in the peaceful locations of the old centre, rapidly changing its status into a 'residential town'. Most of the new settlers brought wealth and new life styles influencing the local population. Now most people prefer concrete homes, since it has become the symbol of prosperity.

Fort Cochin is still connected to the mainland by the two old bridges which were built by the British in the 1930s. These bridges are far too narrow for today's traffic,, and this creates great traffic congestion and it is a major problem for those who commute daily for work. In peak hours the 12 km. journey to Ernakulam can take as much as one hour.



## THE PEOPLE OF FORT COCHIN

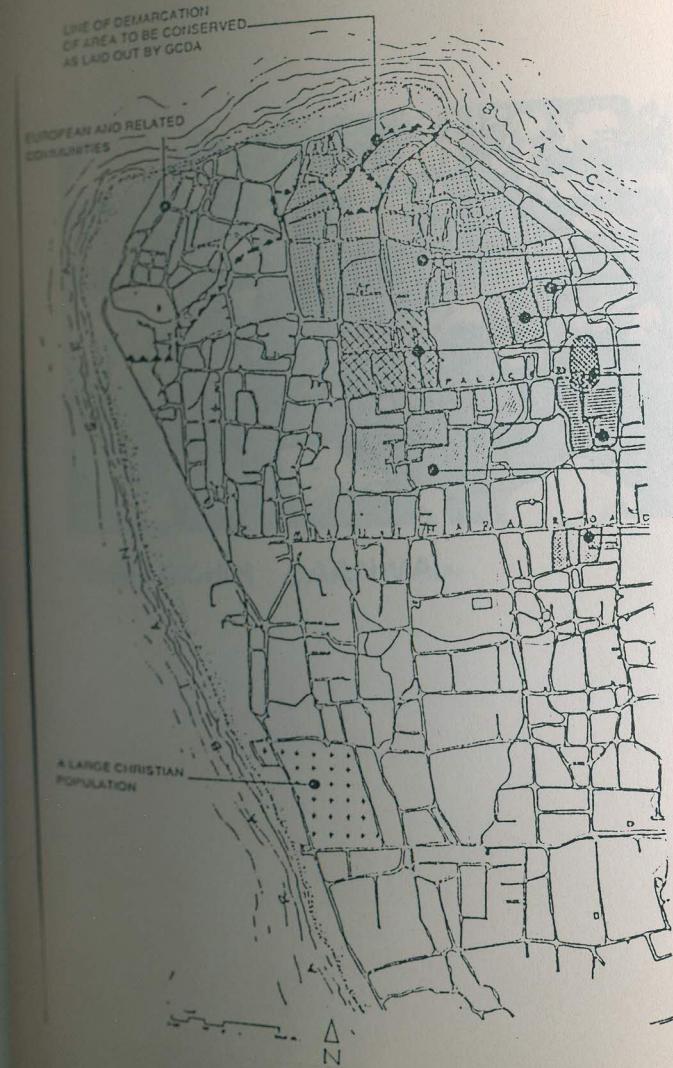
Fort Cochin along with Mattancherry and Palluruthy occupies a gross area of 3544 Hectares and supports a population of about 275,000(approximately 24% of the total population of Cochin city)The population of Fort Cochin has almost an equal strength of the Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities. A once large Anglo Indian community has now become smaller as a large number of them have migrated abroad or to other parts of the country. The Muslim community is the fastest growing, because of the influx of recent times.

### Unique Identity

The people of Fort Cochin can easily be identified by the way in which they speak the Malayalam language. The way words are spoken or pronounced here is not only very different from the way it is done in other parts of Kerala, but also other parts of Cochin city as well. It is very easy for anyone from another part of the city to identify a person from Fort Cochin just by the way he or she speaks. However this is not the only characteristic common to the residents of Fort Cochin.

### Western Influence

The effect of almost five hundred years of Western influence (especially that of the British ) has definitely left its mark on the people of Fort Cochin. The British had used the Fort has their residence, living in huge bungalows with large open cricket fields and club houses. They led a very luxurious and relaxed lifestyle, not doing much work themselves, but employing a large number of servants to get things done. They also spent excessively on food and liquor and had parties and celebrations very often. All of this has had a strong effect on the lives of the local people. The people of Fort Cochin feel they are more 'Westernised' . Their way of dressing, their choice of music etc. are all influenced by this outlook. The presence of a large Anglo Indian community who generally do lead more westernised lifestyles has also affected the other communities.



The lazy lifestyle of the British has influenced the people so much that we find a very large number of unemployed educated youth, spending their time 'hanging out' with their friends, playing cricket/football, or just celebrating and partying for no reason.

### **Sundays - Special to all**

Parties or get-togethers are held by these young groups every Saturday night , and Sundays are celebrated by almost all communities by having special food or family gatherings. The Western influence can easily be seen in the way the young of Fort Cochin dress and also by their fondness of Western music. Fort Cochin has a large number of local music bands which play popular western songs, and these Bands can be heard practicing on Saturdays and Sundays from many a house in the area.

### **Strong Club Culture**

Another unique feature of this area is the large number of clubs there. All age groups of a particular area get together and form these clubs, which then functions as a meeting place, where games are played or parties are held. These clubs also take part in celebrations, festivals and competitions. Thus any event or competition held in Fort Cochin is assured of attracting a large number of participants and it is this nature of the place that encouraged local leaders to start the 'Cochin Carnival'.

### **The Cochin Carnival - A month long celebration**

The Cochin Carnival is held every year for a month in December, finally culminating on New Years day with a big rally. This month long festival has all sorts of competitions, activities and performances, and thousands of people are involved. On New Years day, almost the entire population of the Fort line the roads to witness the procession. In recent years the Carnival has gained enough popularity to attract people from other parts of the city and also from abroad.



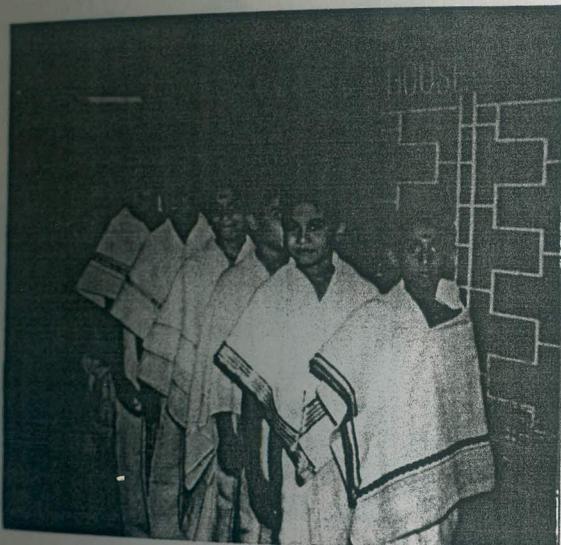
**THE COCHIN CARNIVAL.**

## Grand Christmas Celebrations

Perhaps the most unique thing about the people of Fort Cochin is the way in which Christmas and New Year is celebrated. All communities, irrespective of their beliefs, celebrate Christmas. The month of December is festive time, with almost every home decorated at night with lights, stars etc. It is a really wonderful sight. On Christmas and New Years eve, everyone is out on the streets, making merry and dancing. This is a unique thing about the people here, and it too, speaks volumes about the influence of the Western colonisers. The people of this area still find it very easy to communicate and associate themselves with Westerners. Thus the large number of foreign tourists that come here every year do not have any difficulties in communication or in finding accommodation and food.

## The Multi-Ethnic Groups - Similar and yet different

Despite all their similarities each community in the area has its own identity. Although it is usually not possible to make out differences on the street, the difference in cultural identities can be made out when one studies the lifestyle of each community at home. As part of this project four communities have been studied. - The Anglo-Indian, Christian, Muslim and Hindu communities. Typical families from each were chosen and analysed to find how they have managed to retain their own traditional culture, and also how much of adaptation or conflicts have taken place, or are still doing so.



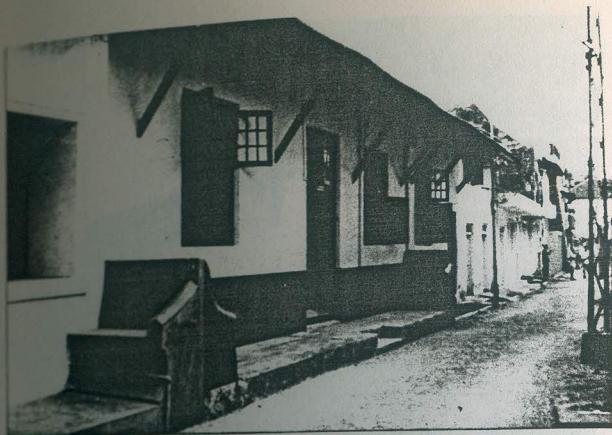
## THE ANGLO INDIANS - Fusion of cultures



As mentioned earlier, the 'Anglo Indians' of Fort Cochin are the descendants from the mixed marriages that took place during the Portuguese period. Since these marriages had taken place at that time with full approval of all communities, the descendants did not have any problem in society. However, over the period of time the Anglo Indians of Fort Cochin have had to adopt themselves more to the local culture, resulting in some difficulties in developing a clear self-image. The ability of the Anglo Indians to communicate with Europeans made it easier for them to get job with Dutch and later British companies and offices. As a result of this close association with the British, they adopted the English language and today only a few Portuguese names remain as reminders of their true descent.

Anglo Indians are all Christian, speak English (even at home) wear European clothes on almost all occasions, have European dietary habits and are engaged in a restricted number of trades. The men are usually in the shipping business and the ladies in offices as receptionists, clerks etc. Since most of the shipping business now operates from Willingdon Island, most of the Anglo Indian have to commute daily from Fort Cochin. Mr. Neil Caesar is one of those who commutes daily. He runs his own customs clearing and transporting firm based in the Island. Mr. Caesar is the typical middle aged Anglo-Indian who has been born and brought up in Fort Cochin. He had his complete education here in one of the Catholic schools and later at the Cochin College, and also married from the same place. The family used to live together with his parents until about ten years ago when he built a new house and shifted over. Mr. Caesar feels that the Anglo-Indian community finds it much easier to maintain their identity now because with the Gulf boom and the onslaught of television and other media the other communities are becoming more 'westernised' and as a result, the Anglo-Indians do not stand out too much now. For example twenty years ago only Anglo-Indian ladies wore western dresses and they were often ridiculed for this. But today almost everybody does so. In fact the Anglo-Indians have also adopted much of the local culture and habits such as dressing - their ladies now wear saris and

churidaars



TOP - DUTCH BUILT HOUSE OF MR. D' COSTA.  
ABOVE - MR. D' COSTA AND HIS SON.

Over the recent years lack of jobs has forced almost half of the community to seek jobs abroad. Many families have migrated from Fort Cochin to other countries or other bigger metropolitan cities in India. At present there are only about 200 families remaining in Fort Cochin.

### Still Maintaining their Identity

Despite all the ambiance or the assimilation to the surrounding, the Anglo-Indian community still maintains most of its strong identity and unique lifestyle, according to Mr. D'Costa. His is one of the few families who have managed to retain their old ancestral home over the generation. Their row house on Burger Street is a Dutch building built in 1735. The family still has the original Dutch deeds to the house, with the wax seals still intact. Mr. D'Costa (who is now in his sixties) explained how his own life style has changed since he was young. His father who used to work for a British firm never went out without his coat, tie and hat. But today Mr. D'Costa no longer wears hats (although he still has a hat stand in his living room holding different hats for different occasions). He wears suits and ties only to formal parties. The change in eating habits is also evident, while he still prefers to use cutlery, his children eat with their fingers. However some things that have not changed at all within the community are the language spoken at home (English), the importance given to education for the children, the frequent parties and celebrations (every birthday in the house is celebrated in grand manner), and the love for music. The general aptitude for music means that most Anglo-Indians play musical instruments, and children are given lessons in piano, guitar etc.

Anglo Indians generally do not believe in saving, and spend excessively on food, liquor and clothing. They believe in enjoying life and so in every possible way, according to Mr. Caesar. All the Anglo-Indians in Fort Cochin make it a point to come home every for Christmas, no matter where they may be working.



TOP: FAMILY OF PHILIP MARCELLINE  
ABOVE - PROCESSION ON SAINT FRANCIS DAY.

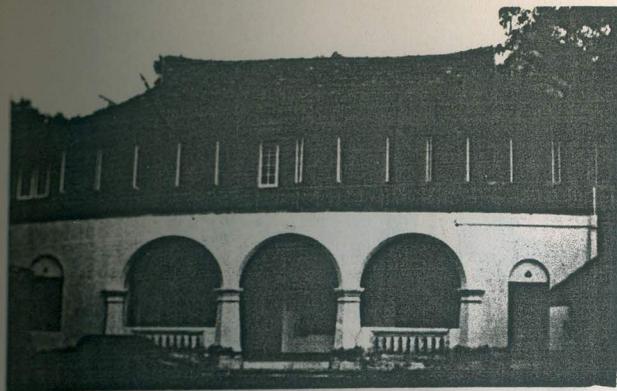
Perhaps, the tradition which is maintained the most is that of marriage. Generally marriages outside the community is discouraged, and arranged marriages are few. Young people are encouraged to seek partners on their own, and if they do so, the financial status of the chosen person is not given much consideration. Dowry is unheard of.

According to Mr.D'Costa and Mr. Caesar, the community as a whole has in the past few years started getting closer to the Church. One wonders if this is a sign of insecurity within the community.

### THE CHRISTIANS

The Christian community of Fort Cochin comprises mainly of Latin Catholics, descendants of Portuguese converts, who practice the Latin rite. These people were the original inhabitants of this coastal town and many of them belong to the fishing community. Wide spread literacy has meant that most of this community has adopted other jobs and professions. A large number of them are working abroad for example the family of Philip Marcelline. Mr. Philips himself and his elder son are working in the Gulf. His wife who is a teacher in a local Catholic school and his younger son who is studying in college are the only residents of their large home. Such split families are very common in the area. Mr. Philip has been away for almost 20 years and comes home only once a year for 45 days. His younger son is also planning to go abroad upon completion of his studies. The prosperity of the family can be seen in the way the small ancestral home they once lived in has been modified and extended. The dining room and kitchen which form part of the old structure, is almost 200 years old but houses the latest furniture and kitchen equipment from Europe.

There are few joint families left in this community. One of them is the Kurishingal family, a wealthy and prominent family in the area. Even today three brothers and their



TOP - THE KURISHINGAL FAMILY HOUSE.  
ABOVE - INTERIOR COURTYARD.

respective families live together in a large house built in the early part of this century. The original ancestral home of the family is also retained in the same compound and is used as the guest house. The main kitchen and dining room for the family is also in this old house.

The Christian community is perhaps the only community which has adopted most of changes over the period of time. Very few of the younger generation in this community still wear traditional attire. However, the Church plays a very important role in their lives and whole family take part in functions, festivals, etc. of the Church. Even the most liberal minded young people get married in the traditional manner, following all religious rites. The Church in Fort Cochin celebrates festivals like Christmas and Easter in grand style, quite unlike the rest of the state, with a lot of fire works, lights etc.

Apart from the Latin Catholics there are other Christians, mainly non-Catholics who have migrated from other parts of Kerala and settled in Fort Cochin. Most of these people had come as traders or businessmen a long time ago, for example Mr. C.C. Joseph, a wealthy business man whose hardware business was started by his grandfather at Mattacherry. Mr. Joseph is a native of Trichur, which lies north of Cochin. He settled in Fort Cochin in 1970, after he managed to buy a piece of prime property and build a new house. Like many others Mr. Joseph had to shifted his business to Ernakulam during the 1960s, and now commutes daily. But this is not much of a problem for him, since he owns a large fleet of cars, including four Mercedes-Benzes. His two sons were born, raised and educated in Fort Cochin, and the family has adapted themselves in some ways to the life style of Fort Cochin. Mr. Joseph says that he and his family are less conservative than their relatives who still live in Trichur.

The influx of Muslims recently and their wide spread acquisition of property in the area (mainly from Christians) have caused the Christian community to reconsider their stand, and be more careful when selling property. This feeling was expressed by many Christians including the local leaders and priests, although all of them admitted that this

stand could lead to friction with the more united and wealthy Muslim community.

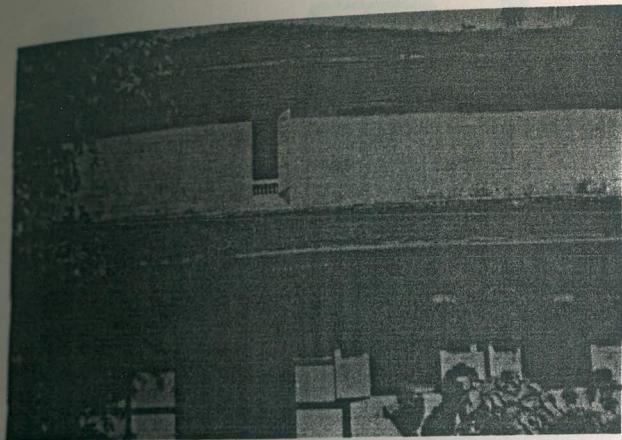
## THE MUSLIMS

The Muslims community in Fort Cochin mainly consists of migrants from the northern part of Kerala. Some of these families migrated over 150 years ago, attracted by trading prospects. Muslim in northern Kerala are the descendants of early Arab converts and inter marriages. Hence many of them retain very conservative and orthodox life styles. They have their own system of education, and still use Arabic in schools and mosques. Although the Muslims of the north are also changing , compared to the Muslim community of Fort Cochin, they have hardly changed at all.

The early migrants were able to retain their strong culture and conservative life styles for quite some time. Take the example of the family of Kottadath Abdul Basheer. The family lives in large house originally built in 1800, when they shad first arrived from Calicut. For many years the family retained the maternal lifestyle of the north, where the ladies of the house would retain the property and valuables. But today this has changed and the main inheritance is for the sons, and the daughters only get a share as dowry at the time of their marriage. The family was also able to live as a joint family until about ten years ago, when there were more than 100 to 150 members in the house. Today the family has become nuclear and other members have built separate houses and moved out (although, a large number of them still lives in the same vicinity). Initially when the family settled in Fort Cochin (they came as traders) , they were aloof and conservative and like all Muslim families of that era, did not mix with the British. The ladies of the house did not come out and in most cases none of the members were educated. Hence the family was able to retain its cultural rooting with the Malabari Muslims for several generations. According to Ershad, the eldest son in the family, Malabari slang (a mix of Arabic and Urdu with Malayalam) was used in the house until two generations ago.



NINAKUTTY MOIDEAN AND HIS SON.



POOVATH FAMILY HOUSE.



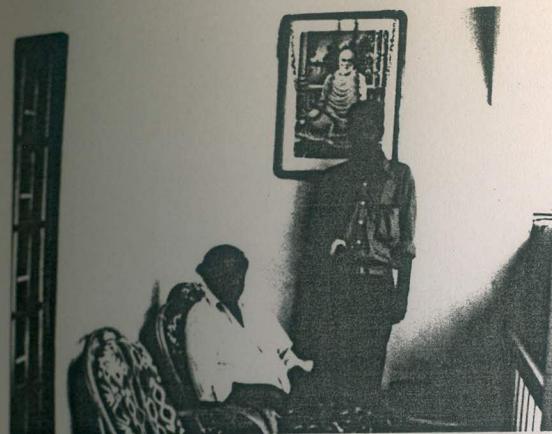
ERSHAD AND HIS FAMILY.

Lifestyles changed when members of the family became educated. For the past 2 to 3 generations, almost every male in the family has been educated mostly in the catholic schools in the area. This changed their outlook and today they are far less conservative, and even women in the household are educated and liberal. However educated the women may be, they are generally not encouraged to go out for work. The life style of the community as a whole has changed much after the Gulf boom with almost every family having several members working there. This has led to many members opting for other professions and as a result there are many engineers, doctors, and lawyers in the community.

The young generation of males are very liberal and join in all parties and celebrations with friends from other communities. Muslim ladies are still more conservative than the ladies of other communities, and many of them still cover their heads when they go out. However the dressing style has today changed and every one wears the latest and most fashionable clothes. The dresses used for marriages is the most typical example of how the community has adapted itself to the present times. While the brides wear saris and garlands like Hindu brides, the males have adapted the Western suit and jacket. The wedding ceremony is still conservative and traditional, with the guests seated separately, males on one side and females on the other.

Perhaps the last joint Muslim family in Fort Cochin is the Poovath family. Two brothers and four sisters with their respective families live together in a large house, built in 1900. The Poovath family also arrived from the north about 150 years ago and established their business in 1858. But like the family of Abdul Basheer, the Poovath family has also changed and become less conservative.

If the migration of the Muslim community from the North during the last century was because of trade, then the present migration or influx of large numbers of families is because of the educational facilities that Fort Cochin offers, plus the fact that it is a nice place to reside. Take the case of the family of Ninakutty Moideen. He arrived with his family in 1977 and bought a house and a shop and settled here mainly because



MR. THANKKAPAN AND HIS SON.



PRAYER ROOM OF A HINDU HOME.

he wanted to get good education for his children. While he is still a very conservative man, who still wears traditional attire, his sons are very liberal. The family as a whole has changed, and they celebrate on Sundays with special meals. The sons party with their friends and have active night lives.

The Muslim community like the Christians feel the slight friction arising out of the influx of the recent migrants and the resulting displacement of the Christian population. It was mentioned that due to this a change was taking place. New migrants when choosing a property preferred to live in areas dominated by members of their own community. This sign of insecurity could lead to clustering of communities and perhaps the formation of smaller pockets within Fort Cochin.

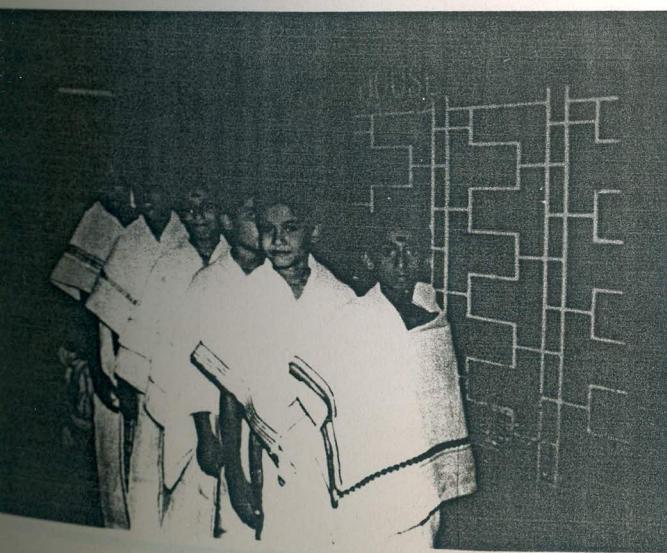
### THE HINDUS

The Hindus of Fort Cochin are, unlike in other parts of the country, not a majority community. This community too has both descendants of the original native people of the land, as well as a large percentage of people who have come from other places and settled here. Like the Christian community, the Hindus have also adapted and changed with the times lot more than the Muslims and the Anglo-Indians. However, the community still retains a lot of religious rites like pujas. All families have a small puja room in their house and occasionally hold large pujas or other religious functions in their house. For example the family of Korakal Thankkapan, a wealthy business man. His family holds a function once every year in which all the Hindu of the vicinity take part. The functions starts with a puja at his house and then there is a procession headed by an elephant to the local temple. Even though the family is very religious the younger generation is less conservative. In fact the younger son of the family married a Muslim girl, and although it caused a stir initially, today they live together in the same house. Like in other parts of Kerala, different sects/castes of Hindus have separate temples, celebrations and functions. However in Fort Cochin such segregation is less evident.

## FORT COCHIN - What the future may hold

This study of Fort Cochin and its people was truly enlightening. The fact that such a large variety of people with different cultural rooting have co-existed in harmony for such a long period of time, and in the process have adapted and mixed with each other to create an identity common to all of them is astonishing. But what is even more astonishing is that (as this study reveals), each community has managed to retain a unique identity for itself. It is these different shades and hues of the people, based on their various cultural roots that adds even more life to the colour of Fort Cochin.

However, recent happenings and phenomena seems to be leading towards different attitudes where communities have started to feel insecure and hence the tendency to group together or get closer to their respective roots, to regain or strengthen their ethnicity. This could lead to a totally different socio-cultural setup and one wonders if the people of Fort Cochin, despite all the invasions and conquests of the past are currently going through their most difficult times.



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