

## Indian Ocean

### Introduction

This paper is a very preliminary attempt to conceptualise a major research programme which will cover the Indian Ocean - an area which stretches from the East African coast all the way to the Philippines. With gross oversimplification, this vast region contains four major civilizational arenas - African, Arabo-Persian, Hindu-Budhist and Malayonesian. Additionally the geographical space covered by the Programme is simply vast - covering approximately one-third of the populated world. The obvious question which arises is whether it is possible to identify such an area as a "unit" or "arena" of study, presumably with the objective or aim of discovering, through analysing case studies, strategic social processes and phenomenon which are common to the "unit" and therefore contribute to the advancement of social theory. Or are we simply indulging ourselves in something which many would consider a non-starter.

This is an important and legitimate question which needs to be answered. It is obviously impossible even to attempt to give a brief answer in this brief introduction to a short fifty-page paper.

### The Maldive Island

Apart from Madagascar, there are six important islands/archipelagos in the eastern part of the Indian Ocean. These are the Comoro Islands (already discussed), the Sychell, Reunion, Mauricius, the Laccadives and the Maldive Islands. Of the six the Comoro, the Laccadives and the Maldive are Islamic islands(Sunni/Shafii). The Comoro is an Islamic country because of the Arab's connection with East Africa. On the other hand the Maldives and Laaccadives became Islamised because of South Arabia's strong historical trade links with the Malabar coast of South west India.

The Maldive is an archipelago of about 1000 islands stretched in a chainlike formation. The total population is 180,000 inhabiting 200 of the islands. Of this population approximately 46,000 live in the capital, Male. The rest of the population is scattered, giving the inhabited islands a population density of between 200 to 3000 persons per island (most island are between 0.4 to 0.8 km long). Cultivation has never been an important activity except for minor supplementary fruits and vegetables to the stable food of rice and fish. Nevertheless land is important for homestead plots which all families have equal access to the remaining land is for cultivation purpose. This is state land. Rights to use this land is given by the state in return for a share of the produce (1/8 for crop produce and 1/2 for trees). Insecurity of tenure inhibits investment and residence qualification (in order to get house plot one must live in the island) inhibits inter-island mobility.

### The Economy

According to Ibn-Battuta (14th century), the, economic links between the Maldives and South Arabia were regular and longstanding: "In the preceding century the islanders conducted a

regular trade with Arabia probably at Aden, in dried fish, coire and cowrie" (quoted in Forbes,p70).The Maldive's economy thus produced three extremely important products. These were:-

(i) Cowries. The cowry shells has been used as a means of exchange since ancient time until very recently. It has been widely used not only in the Indian Ocean basin, but as far away as the West African coast via Europe. Cowries have thus been an extremely important export commodity for the Maldives. Traditionally these were collected by women, each of whom paid 12,000 cowries per year to the state as poll tax;

(ii) Coconut. The coconut has many uses - for food, boat and house building. Before the 16th century, all boats in the Indian Ocean basin (and as far as China) used cord or rope made from coconut fiber to sew and tie together the planks of boats. Iron nails were either unknown or not available. "The Maldives and Laccadives were the scene of a remarkable building activity, for the ships were built entirely of the diverse products of the coconut tree: hulls, masts, stitches, ropes and even sails... The ships made in this way were then loaded with coconut wood and fruit and brought to "Uman and the Gulf" (Hourani, p.91). Coconut was thus a strategic commodity in great demand by all the ship building countries - especially in South Arabia, Oman and Persia where the coconut palm tree did not grow. It was thus a major export commodity for the Maldive economy.

(iii)The Maldive Fish. Tuna fish was and still is a major staple food for the Maldive people. When cooked, smoked and dried, it becomes storable and can last for a "long time". This form of tuna fish came to be known as the Maldive fish. Apparently it was in great demand all over the Indian Ocean as it was considered an average person's "luxury food" item. It was thus an important export product of Maldive economy. At this point a few observation are in order:

- (a) The staple food of the Maldivians was and still is rice and tuna fish. Whereas tuna was available, rice did not grow in the Maldive islands and therefore had to be imported. Hence the necessity for export;
- (b) The natural products of the Maldives were not only exportable commodities, but they were of strategic importance to the region, in contrast to the luxury type of goods such as silk, black pepper, incense etc produced by other countries.
- (c) The geographical position of the Maldive Islands was and still is strategic for trade as well as for supplies in the network of long distance trade routes from South Arabia and the Persian Gulf to South India, South East Asia and back, as well as the direct African\Indian route.

These observations have the following implications:- Firstly the Maldive Islands of necessity has been deeply involved in the network of international trade of the Indian Ocean from ancient times. The expansion of trade to South East Asia turned Male (the capital of the Maldives)into a major entreport for ships on the way back to South Arabia by avoiding the dangerous coral islands of the Laccadives and later the equally dangerous Portuguese on the Malabar coast. The return voyage from South East Asia thus became safer and quicker (Forbes,p.77-82).

**"To these islands come many ships of the Moor from China, Mulaco, Peegu, Malaca, Camatra, Benguala and Ceilam, in their passage to the Red Sea. Here they take in water, provisions and other necessities for the voyage... Among these islands are lost many rich vessels of the Moors, which in their passage of the ocean dare not make the coast of Malabar for fear of our shiups". (D. Barbarosa, quoted in Forbes p.80). Secondly given the nature of the archipelago (a chain of 1000 small islands), it was perhaps not accidental that a centralised state with administrative machinery should have emerged early in Maldive's history in order to regulate the extensive trade transactions between the Maldive and the international market.**

### **Islamization and Links with South Arabia**

**The Maldive Islands pose a number of issues/problems for this Programme. Firstly the islands are definitely within the sphere/orbit of the Hindu/Budhist civilizations. It had strong links with Hindu civilization up to the 4th century AD and then linked with Budhist Sri Lanka - only 650km away - up to the 10th century. Thus the Maldives turned to and became Islamised around the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12th centuries when trade between South Arabia and S.E. Asia was very intensive. Why this turn to another civilization -to Islam -with all its implications.**

**Secondly, as far as we can tell from the literature, there were no large scale South Arabian migrants/settlers and their descendants, nor are there many Maldivians who claim any descent from South Arabians -unlike the Indian Mappila Muslims and Sri Lankan Muslims. Personally however, I do not believe that trading contacts with South Arabia alone were enough to turn the Maldivians into Muslims to the extent of destroying Budhist temples during the early phase of Islamiazation. Why not stay Budhist or become Hindu? It seems that serious research is needed to explain the change over from Budhism to Islam.**

**Thirdly starting from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Arab trade in the Indian Ocean was almost totally obliterated first by the Portuguese and later by the Dutch, French and British. Indeed the Portuguese, as part of their well known policy of forcefully Christianising Muslims as well as acquiring commercial gains, colonised the Maldives for nearly one century and converted one of the Sultans to Christianity. The Maldivians threw out the Portuguese but soon came under the hegemony of the Dutch and later the British - both powers being based in Sri Lanka, 650km away. The Maldives stayed Muslim and Shafii and continued to maintain their multiple links with the Muslim Arab world.**

**Let us now turn to the major issue of the change over to Islam by the Maldives and attempt a brief explanation. The story normally given of how the first Maldive ruler was converted to Islam, follows a widespread pattern of similar stories - especially in S.E. Asia. The ruler was impressed by the religious powers of a Moroccan Muslim saint, became a Muslim and urged his populace to follow suit. This was followed by orders to destroy Budhist temples - the symbol of the previous religion and Sri Lankan rule. The story may be historically true or it may be simply a myth - what Anthropologist call "a charter". Whatever**

the case may be, I believe there were objective conditions at the time which were attractive enough for the Maldives to change and embrace Islam.

1. Firstly both the Hindus from Gujerat (up to 4th century AD) and the Buddhist from Sri Lanka (4th to 10th century AD) had ruled the Maldives. The Maldives were within the orbit or sphere of Hindu Buddhist civilization but wanted to maintain their independence. In order to do this successfully (given its size in comparison to India and Sri Lanka) the Maldives had to align itself to a third force eg. Muslim Arabs.
2. Secondly between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries Hindu India was itself fighting a rear-guard battle against the onslaught of Islam which had occupied most of the Indian sub-continent. Furthermore, Sri Lanka also was weakened by internal strife and by the 6th century the Maldives was in the process of separating from Sri Lanka.
3. During the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, the South Arabians and Omanis dominated the trade to South India, the Maldives and S.E. Asia. As explained earlier the Maldives was thus an important part of this trading network. It was during this period that the Maldives embraced Islam. However the mere fact of trading does not necessarily lead to conversion. In this case however trading took a particular significance and importance because of the circumstances described in 1 and 2 and because of the international status of Islam.
4. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Islamic power and civilization occupied longitudinally the "Euro-Asian spine" -from the Iberian peninsula to China, down both the coasts of East and West Africa, most of India and was spreading very fast in S.E. Asia. For the first time in history one religion and its civilization had spread to most parts of the old world. Islamic civilization therefore had a hegemonic position in the world and its status and prestige was perhaps the highest in the league of world civilisations. The Maldives being involved in extensive trading relations with South Arabians and other Muslim countries (Persians, Gujaratis, Mapilas, Bengalis etc.), must have found Islamic civilization extremely attractive. In my view it is a combination of these objective conditions which may explain the Maldives' embrace of Islam.
5. According to the story of conversion, it was a Moroccan Muslim saint who converted the first Maldives King to Islam (1153). Additionally Ibn Batuta, a Moroccan geographer, was the chief Qadhi of the Maldives for one and a half years (1343-4). Indeed the Maldives followed the Malki school from first conversion to Islam right to the Portuguese conquest of Maldives in 1558-73. After the Portuguese were thrown out by the Maldives, they then became Shafii from that point on to the present. Despite this religious connection with Morocco (Malki sect), the links with South Arabia must have been very strong for the Maldives to change from a Sunni/Malki to a Sunni Shafii country. What were these links?
  - (i) From ancient times trade links were very strong until the disruption of Arab trade in the Indian Ocean by the Portuguese in the 16th century. These were reduced to a trickle for some two centuries after, and have now come to a virtual stop. Associated with this

long standing historical link are the social, cultural and religious relationships which grew steadily from the start of the contacts, through merchant colonists, migrant religious proselytiser and temporary residents/passers-by. This interaction between the Maldivians and the South Arabians in particular brought about not only the conversion to Sunni/Shafii Islam, but affected important areas of the Maldivian's social and cultural system. Indeed it has been noted by the famous Ibn-Batuta that the Maldivian society was particularly welcoming and absorptive of foreigners and their customs and institutions. He states "It is easy to get married in these islands, owing to the smallness of the dowry, as well as by reason of the agreeable society of the women. Most of them say nothing about a nuptial gift, contenting themselves with declaring their profession of the Musulman faith... When foreign ships arrive there the crews take wives, whom they repudiate on their departure; it is a kind of "temporary marriage" (quoted in Forbes p.80). Ibn-Batuta himself proudly states that he had four legal wives, besides concubines, during his one and a half year's stay in the Maldives (Forbes, p.80). According to Bell, the Arabs, in annually increasing numbers, made what he calls peaceable "squatting", and through intermarriages, eventually established Islam, especially in the northern Maldivian atolls. He thus observes: "traces of the Arab physiognomy become less and less noticeable Southwards from the more Northerly Atolls, until they are all but non-existent in the usually heavy features of the Southern Islanders" (quoted in Forbes p.88).

Apart from the settlers-intermarriage process, and the socio-cultural impact of local/foreigners interaction normal in a major entreport, the deepest impact on the Maldivian society was its absorption of the Sunni/Shaffi school of Islam, brought about by the settlement of a series of important religious families from the Yemen and Hadhramawt. "As might be expected, these Arab settlers often rose to positions of considerable importance in the non-Arab but Islamic Maldives - no doubt as in Malabar, East Africa and South East Asia, they were considered to be "charismatic" and worthy of respect by the Maldivians"(Forbes, p89). Many of the Qadis - the top most religious position - in Maldives were Arabs from South Arabia. For example:- \*The Qadi of the Maldivian at the time of Ibn-Batuta's visit was from Yemen.\*In the early 17th century, a South Arabian Qadi was returning to South Arabia from Sumatra where he had been well received and given wealth, passed through the Maldives. On hearing about him, the King "besought him to remain, that he at length consented, and became so familiar with the King as to be permitted to eat with him, an honor never done to any other person" (Forbes, p.89).

A learned theologian and a Sayyid (Sayyid Muhammad Shams al-Din) of Yemen visited Malabar where he proselytised for sometime before proceeding to Sumatra. On his way back to Arabia, he arrived in Male in 1686 AD. Where he was "received with special honor, being met by the Sultan himself in person. Invited to teach orthodoxy, the Sayyid introduced several drastic reforms into existing customs."(Bell, quoted in Forbes p.90). Sayyid Muhammad Shamsu al-Din later became a Sultan of the Maldives in 1692 and ruled for one and a half year. He was given the unique honor of being buried in the Male Shrine where the Moroccan Sheikh who converted the first Maldivian Sultan to Islam, was buried.

**\*In addition to Muhammad Shams -al-Din, there have been two other Arab Sultans of Maldives; these were Sayyid Muhammad (1466-68AD), and Sharif Ahmad (1510-13 AD.). \*Up to the time of the Portuguese conquest of the Maldives and their overthrow (1558-73 AD.), the Maldivians were following the Malki School introduced by the Moroccan saint. After the departure of the Portuguese, a Sayyid from Hadhramaut (Sayyid Muhammad Jamal-ud-Din), came to Male after having spent fifteen years studying at the Shafii centers of Hadhramaut and at Zabid, in Yemen. He "was received by the Sultan with great honors than ever before showered on any learned aldavian"(Bell, quoted in Forbes, p.91). As a result of his teachings, the Shafii School spread throughout the archipelago replacing the Malki School introduced by the Moroccan saint in 1153. \*In Malabar, the Shafii School had been long established and widely accepted. At the same time the Sayyid class there was large, with a longer history, very influential and monopolised the religious institutions. This was symbolised by the Ponnani religious school (founded in the 12th century by a South Arabian) which trained and still does, religious teachers for Malabar, the Laccadive and often the Maldives. The shrine of the founder of the school (a Sayyid) is the most venerated in Malabar and pilgrimage is made to it annually. The Malabar has had, over a long period, a considerable influence on the Laccadives, Maldives and Ceylonese.**

**Indeed there have always been exchanges of religious teachers and scholars amongst the Sayyid families between these areas, with Malabar playing the dominant role. This local interaction has thus strengthened both the Shafii school and the status and influence of the Sayyid families.**

**ii) By embracing Islam, the Maldives had to introduce into their state administration an Islamic legal system and some administrative institutions eg. The Qadhi, a judge who resided in the capital Male and advised the Sultan; the Naybe, a governor of a province responsible for the administration of justice, religion and education; the Khateeb, a chief of several islands who acted as a religious superior of the islands and as instructor of the law. There were also many teachers of Koranic schools both in Male and in the islands. This system needed both personnel and training. Hadhramaut and Zabid in lowland Yemen are the heartland of Shafiiism with well known religious universities and producing a large number of learned religious personalities and cadre who migrated to many other parts of the Indian Ocean. It was to the Hadhramaut that the Maldives turned to for what I can only call "technical assistance" - personnel and training for its religious and administrative institutions. This link between the Maldives and South Arabia has continued for a long time.**

**In addition to South Arabia producing training and personnel for the administration and religious institutions as well as some Sultans, there is also an intriguing piece of information mentioned by Ibn Batuta that at the time of his stay in Male, the Sultan relied on a mercenary army of a thousand men. He did not mention the origin/nationality of the army. However we know that Hadhramaut was a well known source of mercenary soldiers who served for various Indian kingdoms, and Oman (for its E. African territories). It will therefore not be far fetched if these Maldives' mercenary army was from Hadhramaut, given the strong links between the two countries. Thus "technical assistance" may have extended to the military field. Sunni/Shafii Islam in the Maldives was thus strong enough to survive a strong Shia (the Indian version) presence in late 19th century. One of the curious facts about the Maldives is**

that in the 1860s when they were economically at a low ebb, and needed both capital and merchantile expertise, they turned to the Shia Bohra of Gujerat, India, and not to the South Arabians with whom they have historical links. It may be that the Arabs had the expertise but not the capital whereas the Bohra had both. Whatever the case may be the Bohra did very well economically and when they became too powerful, they were thrown out by the state through a simple technique of denying them import/export licences. But despite the economic power and high social status the Bohra community came to acquire, Shiism did not make any inroads and the Maldives remained solidly Sunni and Shafii. These links thus presume a strong relationship between the Maldivian and South Arabia. How far has this relationship persisted to the present? Unfortunately the answer to this question is that we do not know enough about the present situation. For example the incumbent President of the Maldivian is a graduate of the famous Islamic University -Al-Azhar of Cairo - rather than a graduate of secular European/American universities, thus indicating the political importance of Islam. Indeed the oath of the President when he takes offices, puts respect for Islam first and for the constitution second, thus " I swear by Allah that I shall respect the religion of Islam, the constitution of the Maldivian...". But this strong affinity to Islam does not tell us very much about the present specific relationship with South Arabia (a central theme of this Programme). Indeed Haaland's 1987 paper on the socio-economic situation in the Maldivian does not mention South Arabian migrant or their descendants\*. It seems that the descendants of the early migrants have become completely integrated as to ignore their Arabian ancestry and that the few who do, play an insignificant role in Maldivian society today. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in Malabar, Sri Lanka, Laccadive - indeed the rest of the Indian Ocean areas where South Arabians have settled and where the Shafii School is found. Why then is the Maldivian an exception? Compared to the literature about the role of the South Arabians in S.E.Asia, India, E. Africa, the absence of such literature on the role of the Arabs in the Maldivian must have some significance (Forbe's article is a noble exception). Either we do not have much information on this issue, or that the Maldivian is a special case which needs particular research attention in this Programme j\*Ft.Haaland states that while doing his field research in the Maldivian, he was told that there were about 7 families in Male who claimed Hadhrami Sadah descent, but that he was unable to confirm this. Personal communication. Because of the difficulties of obtaining literature on the Maldivian I have had to rely heavily on three sources:-

1. Gunnar Haaland "Evolution of Socio-Economic Dualism in the Maldivian", DERAP A363, Bergen, January 1987.
2. A.D.W. Forbes" Southern Arabia and the Islamisation of the Central Indian Ocean Archipelago".
3. Indian Ocean: five island countries - Area Handbook Series, 1983, ch.5 Note: See S K Notepad for a note on a theoretical point concerning the absence of state support to the South Arabian traders and the migration process. The Mappilla Muslim of Malabar (South India): a case study. Phases of evolution of Mapp. Society: Phase I. From 1st to 16th Century AD: Early contacts with Arab and Muslim traders: Islamization and evolution of a distinct Mapp. society. Phase II. 1500 to 1670 (p.60-77) Arrival and establishment of Portuguese -destruction of Arab trade, Portuguese

trades monopoly and blockade, colonisation, wars and aggressive and systematic attempts at uprooting Islam.

Phase III. 1670-1760:Dutch and early British,(p.77-84). Defeat of Portuguese. Expansion of trade and lifting of blockade. European rivalries and local alliances. The adverse impact of this period on the Mappila. Phase IV.1800-1947:Emergence of British supremacy in all India. The Mysorian Period 1792-1800. Muslim rulers and their impact on these Mapp,(p85-100). The British Period 1792-1921:From trade to "ruling for Profit". Muslim decline and negative Mappila reaction (p.100-120) Mappila resistance 1821-1921 (during this period there were a total of 51 Mappila outbreaks, culminating in the 1921 tragic Rebellion, p.109 para1).Also especially see section on Muslim numerical growth,p120-122). The Mappila Rebellion of 1921 (p.124-153). Phase V. 1921-1972: The Present. Mappila entry into political life, the nationalist period 1921-1947,(p159-167). Mappila assumption of political powe`1948-1972,(p167-221). Islamic character of Mappila attitudes towards modern education Mappilla and communism. The significance of Mappila`s experience. The importance of this case study to the research Programme.

### **The Indian Ocean: An International Arena of Politico-Economic and Cultural Interaction**

From as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> millinium BC to the 17<sup>th</sup> century AD. The Indian Ocean basin was the arena of the world's greatest maritime international commercial network and the concomitant political interaction, before modern times. Its shores -the African, the Arabian, the Persian, the Indian, the Malay-Indonesian and as far as the Chinese shores, - were connected together through many intersecting sea routes into a vast economic block as well as a cultural sphere/unit. Thus at different epochs, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Africans, Persians, Indians, Indonesians and Chinese mingled in the markets of the different shores, exchanged goods on the bases of mutually acceptable commercial rules, influenced each other culturally and technologically, and, of long standing importance, they established trading colonies and the emigration of populations between the various regions. This mosaic provides the context of the specific historical and contemporary phenomena/processes we wish to study. Central to the Indian Ocean basin complex, is the role played by the Arabs\* -specifically the South Arabians (the Yemenis, Hadhramis, Mahras and Umanis)- during the historical period and the carryover effect to the contemporary situation. This historic role pre-ceded Islam, although the rise of Islamic power and civilisation boosted Arab activities in the Indian Ocean to a pr-eminent and dominating position. Hourani\* points out that the South Arabian's favourable geographical position enabled it to play a unique intermediary economic role between the Indian Ocean and the Far East on the one hand and the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia on the other. "In certain general respect geography favoured the development of sailing from Arabian shores. A very long coast line bounds the peninsula on three side, stretching from the Gulf of Suez round to these head of the Persian Gulf. Near these coast lie the most fertile parts of Arabia, al-Yaman, Hadramawt, and Uman;....Commerce with neighbouring countries was invited, to the west by the long shores of Northeast Africa, to the northeast by those of Iran, in both cases extending parallel to and not far out from the Arabian shore, approaching it closely at the extreme ends; so that across the enclosed waters

of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf the Arabs might be in contact with two of the most ancient centers of wealth and civilisation - Egypt and Iran -not to mention Mesopotamia, which they could reach either by sea or by land. Beyond Arabia to the southwest, it was easy to cross to East Africa and coast along it in search of tropical products; to the east the coast of Iran led to India - and eventually the monsoon winds were to assist voyages both to Africa and to India. Most important of all, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, supplemented by the Nile, the Euphrates and the Tigris, are natural channels for through traffic between the Mediterranean basin and Eastern Asia: the Arabs were astride two of the world's great routes."(Hourani, p.4&5). Although there were considerable natural obstacles to be overcome - dangerous coral islands and strong winds in the Red Sea, lack of fresh water in the Persian Gulf, lack of natural harbours on the Arabian coast, the desolated Indian coast, rampant piracy all over the different coasts, lack of strong timber and coire to build strong ships needed to face the moonsoon etc - nevertheless these difficulties were slowly overcome during the 3rd and 2nd millenium BC. During this period while the Arabs were trying to overcome these maritime obstacles, they at the same time "developed camel routes along the whole western side of their peninsula"(Hourani,p.5.). "Indian Ocean trade was transported largely overland to the markets of the western Mediterranean coast, Mesopotamia, and Egypt.....Caravan cities, colonies of southern Arabia, developed along these trade routes and became the nuclei of the important cities of the Hejaz in the medieval period. The use of the camel as a carrier and the development of such caravan cities as Mecca and Yathrib (present-day Medina), Palmyar, and Petra formed a part of legacy of the south Arabians to the north that eventually enabled the north to succeed to mercantile supremacy. Because of demand of south Arabian products grew, prices rose, trade routes increased, and the transportation of goods became organised under strict control. Increased trade was possible because of more effective use of the camel, which had originally been domesticated by the south Arabians as a dairy animal".(Handbook,p.12). There were other routes to the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia - mainly from Dhofar to Gerrha (present-day Gulf States area), and from Medina direct to Baghdad.(see map, Handbook p.11). But despite this extensive development of the caravan land routes, "the coasts of Arabia were in all historical ages in contact by sea with other countries".(Hourani,p.6). At this point it might be good to look at the content of the trade i.e. the actual goods exchanged, their origin and the mode of payment. First of all South Arabia itself produced incense - myrrh and frankincense. Pearls were obtained from the Persian Gulf. From India came silk, cotton and various type of fine clothes, jewels, rice, tropical spices (especially black pepper- at one time referred to as black gold), teak timber, coconut wood and coire, swords, various types of animals etc. From China came mainly porcelin, silks and textiles of different types; and from the Malay-Indonesian region came various products -spices (pepper),rice, copper, gold and textile etc. and from northeastern and East Africa, came tropical products, animals, ivory, rhinoceros horns, wild animal skins, ambegris, mangrove poles, dried fish, and slaves. Exchange of these goods was done partly by barter as ships moved from one entreport and emporium to another and partly in gold and copper coins. From Athens and Rome, through Alexandria (Egypt)large quantities of wine, bronze, tin, gold and various manufactured articles were exported to South Arabia, Africa (the northeastern coast, Axum and the east African coast),and India. At the time of Nero (AD.54-68) Pliny complained that the Roman Empire was being drained of its currency. Indeed large numbers of Roman coins have been found in India. Although the volume of trade varied from one epoch to another,

the ruling classes in Egypt, the Mediterranean, Mesopotamia and Iran, never seemed to be short of money to buy the luxury goods from the East which they needed - even during the declines of various empires and kingdoms. Thus the volume of trade was consistently high. At the height of Greco-Roman trade with India and Arabia (31BC.-AD.96), no fewer than 120 ships per year were known to have sailed from the Suez to India. The number of ships kept on increasing each century. For example the great Chinese explorer Cheng Ho (a Chinese Muslim eunuch) made various voyages between 1405-19, reaching as far as Malindi on the East African coast. In one of his voyages, he commanded 317 ships with 27,870 men on board. The number of ships of all nationalities, criss-crossing all the routes of the Indian Ocean basin and calling on all the ports in any given year must have been enormous. This was the world's largest maritime commercial network of its kind in the world. There were many merchants from different nationalities involved in this vast network of international trade - Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Arabs (Yemenis, Hadhramis, Mahras and Umanis), Auxumites, Persians, Indians, Malayo-Indonesians, and Chinese. It was however the Arabs who played a crucial role in this trading network and who came to dominate it continuously right up to the 16th century.

From the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. the Egyptians have been sailing down the Red Sea to Punt (Somali and Yemeni coasts) and back (a most difficult journey and therefore a remarkable achievement of the time), with Arabs participating in this trade both at sea and by land. This trade continued right to the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, after which Darius, the Persian King(521-485 BC.) linked Persia with India and Egypt by sea round the Arabian coast. Thus the South Arabians increasingly played a crucial role in the growing trade for an enlarged and expanding market. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. "the towns of South Arabia and Socotra were at this period the entrepots of all intercourse between Egypt on one side and India on the other". (Hourani, p.23). Indeed by this time "Socotra had acquired its cosmopolitan character, with Indians, Arabs, Greeks and probably Persians and Africans mingling in its market".(ibid). And in the middle of the 1st century AD., "Arab merchant ships from Muza (present-day Mukha) and Cane(Husn al-Ghurab)were conducting a regular commerce with Barygaza (the Indus valley)". (ibid, p.33)Furthermore it is known that they have been sailing for centuries to the Malabar coast to fetch the timber of which their own ships were built. On the East African coast Arab merchants were found everywhere, as far south as Rhapta, on the coast of present-day Tanzania. Of Rhapta the Periplus says it is ruled by a Yemeni prince, and by some ancient rights, it is under the sovereignty of Muza (Mukha, Yemen). Arab merchant ships traded regularly with Rhapta, and that the Arabs intermarried with the locals and that they knew both the coast and the language of the people. In the eastern part of south Arabia, the Umanis were playing an equally important role in the Persian Gulf, and participating with their own ships in the Indian trade all the way to Cylone. During this period and right up to the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. the Sassanids (Persians) were the dominating power in this region and therefore active traders. Ceylone at the time was the entreport of the silk from China which was then bought by the Persian, Umanis, Sabians (Yemenis, reported to be living in Ceylone in 414 AD.) etc. With the Byzantine Empire on the west, that of the Sassanids on the East, and the rise of Auxum kingdom across the Red Sea, the South Arabian went into a temporary decline by the beginning of the 6th century. The emergence of Islam in mid 6th century AD. however, brought about profound changes to the whole situation of the Indian Ocean. The Islamic empire united western Asia, Egypt and

Persia into a major economic block. Secondly the advantageous and direct route between the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia to Syria was reestablished and made operational. Thirdly while the Islamic empire remained one the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea were no longer rival routes. They were used side by side and the extent of their use depended on the size and prosperity of the two markets of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Fourthly the Islamic empire brought a Renaissance to the Arabs. "For several centuries the Arabs showed an unusual energy in all fields of life. This energy extended to warfare, travel, and commerce, as well as to literature of travel, geography and history." (Hourani, p53). Finally the establishment of the Islamic empire made the Indian Ocean "a sea of peace" (the nearest enemies being the pirates of northwest India), thus creating the conditions for a great expansion of commerce during this epoch the simultaneous emergence of the Islamic empire and the Chinese T'ang dynasty between the sixth and ninth centuries AD. The whole Muslim world from Spain to al-Sind(India) was united under the Umayyad and the Abbasids(660-870 AD),while at the same time the T'ang dynaty united the whole of China with unbroken peace for two and a half centuries. The existence of these two "world" markets stimulated the greatest expansion of commerce in the Indian ocean ever seen. The sea route from the Persian Gulf to Canton (established by the Sassanid Persians and 25 Umanis in the pre-Islamic period) was the longest in regular use by mankind before the European expansion in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This traffic was inherited by the Arabs who revived it and dominated it to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The Abbasid empire broke down at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and the Chinese dynasty in 907 AD. This brought to an end the direct route to Canton, and the Arabs and Chinese merchants began to meet on the western coast of the Malaccan peninsula, at the time part of Indonesia. In fact at the time the Arabs were already extensive trade with Sumatra and Java. Egypt was conquered by the Fatimids in late 10<sup>th</sup> century and began to replace Baghdad as the center of population and wealth in the Islamic world. Thus the Red Sea route to the Far East became even more important to the point that Aden was described as "the gateway to China". As pointed out earlier, Arab trade with East Africa goes back to the 1st century, the Yemen-Rhapta link. Indeed the revolt of the African slaves in 870 AD. against the Abbasids (a major cause of Caliphate's downfall) indicate an extensive trade in previous centuries. According to.....these slaves came mostly from the Somali coast and some from further down. The Omanis, the Pesians and the eastern south Arabians had extensive regular traffic through Aden down to Sofala and northern Madagascar. Many settlements were established on island, creeks, or river estuaries from Mogadisu all the way down to Madagascar. Indeed there were three known major waves of emigrants specifically from Hadhramwt during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, some migrants settling down in the various established city states down the East African coast such as Mogadishu and all the way down to the Comoro Islands. In summery therefore it can be said that the South Arabians dominated the trade, the traffic and the routes of this important international network of commerce, from the emergence of Islam to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They first established trading colonies in the heavily populated regions of India, South East Asia and even China, while in East Africa they established permanent settlements along the coast. Through continuous emigration of a highly motivated religious intellectual-cum-missionaries (almost all of whom claiming descent from the Prophet Muhammad), followed by traders and soldiers of fortune, and through intermarriage with the local population, they created overtime, a variety of locally adapted Islamic culture with strong affinity and direct links with South Arabia -especially Hadhramawt and Yemen. In 1498,the Portuguese captain Vasco da Gama reached

Malindi - an Arab settlement on the East African coast - and there met the greatest captain and navigational scientist of the time, Ahmad ibn-Majid al-Mahri from Hadhramawt. Ironically it was this man who showed the Portuguese captain the route to India. "At the heart of the Portuguese entry into India was the drive for economic power, the control of the spice trade and the amassing of the wealth associated with the Orient. These had dazzled the imagination of the Europeans for centuries; but that treasure appear to be locked in the hands of the Arab Muslims....The desire to circumnavigate that blockade had driven Columbus to the shores of America.." and Vasco da Gama to India.<sup>1</sup> Closely associated with the economic expansion was the religious motivation. The Pope through a charter called the padroado, had place on the Portuguese the obligation "to propagate the Catholic religion in all new lands discovered by her, as a condition of being allowed to hold them in conquest with the papal sanction and benediction"<sup>2</sup>.The dual objectives -economic and religious - were perused systematically, ruthlessly and with extreme cruelty by the Portuguese. Alfonso Albuquerque, the Portuguese admiral and administrator for the Indian Ocean, at the time of his reception in Goa in 1510 said concerning the death of 6000 Muslims: "It was indeed a great deed and well carried out. "Miller adds that "In his bitter persecution of the Muslims the admiral was representative rather than exceptional"(Miller,p.62.). And "Da Gama arrived at Calicut having scattered Muslim naval opposition on the way. He rejected the suit of the Zamorin (the ruler of Calicut) who had offered to turn over twelve Muslims and a large sum of money to the captain. Da Gama chose to shell the city. There after he seized twenty-four rice vessels which were approaching Calicut; cut off the hands, ears and noses of 800 crew members; tied their feet and out knocked their teeth with sticks to prevent escape; heaped them on board the vessels and set them on fire. After similarly mutilating the Brahmin emissary of the Zamorin he sent him to shore with some of the lopped-off members and a written note to the Zamorin "to have a curry made".(Miller,p.65-66.). n East Africa Francis Almeida savagely attacked and plundered Mombassa in 1505. The ruler of Mombasa sent a letter to a neighboring ruler of Malindi: "May God protect you Sayyid Ali. I have to inform you that we have been visited by a mighty ruler who has brought fire and destruction amongst us. He raged in our town with such might and terror that no one, neither man nor women, neither the old nor the young, nor even the children however small, was spared to live. His wrath was to be escaped only by flight. Not only people, but even the birds in the heavens were killed and burnt. The stench of the corpses is so overwhelming that I dare not 1. (Miller,p.61). 2. (quoted in Miller,p.61) 27 enter the town...(quoted in . Esmond B. Martin, p.18). The pattern of attacks were the same in the Arabian coast, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf (see Sergeant). In this way the Portuguese conquered and colonized many of the important towns and trading centers in the Indian Ocean. "Within fifteen years, the Portuguese controlled most of the strategic towns of East Africa, Arabia and India.....(They) attempted to monopolise the gold and ivory trade of eastern Africa, the horse trade of Hormuz, the textile of western India, and the spice trade of Malabar by enforcing a law requiring all non-Portuguese vessels (i.e. Arabian, Indian and Persian) to carry passports(cartazes). Not to do so risked forfeiture of life, ship and goods" (Martin,p.220).Thus trading continued, at a lower level, and under Portuguese control. This led to start and expansion of smuggling, as a form of trade, in sharp contrast to the totally free trade before the coming of the Portuguese.

Portuguese power in the Indian Ocean began to decline in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and supplemented by other European powers, the British eventually becoming the dominant power in Ocean. Thus emerged two trading system in the Indian Ocean - the continuation of the traditional trading carried on by Arabian, Indian and Persian dhows(sailing ships),and the European trade carried on at first by sailing ships and later by steam ships. With the decline of Portuguese power, the traditional trade began to increase without harassment until 1822 when the British began to supervise shipping from East Africa in search of slaves in order to set them free. For example a British Liutenant, Charles Smith of H.M.S. London, "during a twenty-one month period (1880-1882), sighted 513 dhows off East Africa, boarded 420 of them and released 190 slaves" Esmond. B.Martin, p.221). This gives an indication of the scale of the traditional trade which continued in the India Ocean and which the Portuguese had tried so hard to destroy. The trade between South Arabia, the Persian Gulf and India continued on an even larger scale. However towards the end of the 19th century and this century, this traditional trade declined somewhat but nevertheless survived. For example between 1907 and 1962, an average of 358 dhows Arabian, the majority, Indian and Persian) entered the East African port of Zanzibar annually. And from 1926 to 1964 dhows were responsible for carrying 11.6% of the total foreign trade of Zanzibar (Esmond B.Martin, p.135). In the Arab side of the Gulf, there were, during the two months of October and November 1972, in various ports, 505 cargo dohws,18 passenger dhows, and 215 fishing dhows(over 20ft long)i.e.a total of 738 dhows. On the Iranian side, there were 238 cargo dhows in June 1973 (Esmond B.Martin, p156,& 196). These dhows of different nationalities, operate in the Gulf itself, along the Arabian coast into the Red Sea, down the East African coast and on the eastern side down the 28 Indian coast as far south as Sri Lanka. Trading by dhow with S.E.Asia stopped sometime in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In this section I have tried to look at the historical context of the international network of commerce, from the earliest time to the present. In the course of this brief and condensed survey, I have tried to indicate the expanding scale of the trade during the different epochs, the involvement of different nationalities, the commodities most traded in, the rise and fall of different markets, the routes (see map....), the critical role played by the Arabs in the network, the eventual domination of the Indian Ocean by the European powers, and the relegation of the pre-sixteenth century world famous trading network into an informal trading network surviving in this century. This then provides the context within which we can now look in more details at the impact of the South Arabians on the various regions within the Indian Ocean basin - the East African coast, the Indian west coast, the Malayo-Indonesian nexus - as well as the "backward linkages" as it were, of these regions on South Arabia itself.

29 ad.(Note: include map in Area Handbook p.11. On land route se Handbook p12. then quote H.p6para2. then describe the goods traded. the H's quotations about the intermediary role and maritime activities of South Arabia, including the routes impact of rise of Islamp52-3. Trade with China before Islam and during firs 3cent.after Islam. Then stopped and Malay-Indonesia became important. Effect of the two major markets: when Egypt is powerful, Red Sea and eastern S.Arabia (Yemen, Hadhramt) become very active: when Mesopotamia and Iran powerful, Uman becomes more active through Persian Gulf. 10<sup>th</sup> century to 16thc.trade dominated by s.arabian H.p78-84. The coming of the Portuguese and other Europeans - breakdown of Arab trade to a trickle beyond of 17<sup>th</sup> c Port. activities off S. Arabia, colonisation in India and E. Africa. But Omani sea power survived and rid

Portug from E.A. and established themselves. Continues emigration to India, S.E.Asia and E. Africa. before Europeans and later in 18th and 19th cent.).

**The Mappila Muslims of Kerala (India).** This case study of the Mappila is important for a number of reasons. Firstly Kerala is one of the few places in the world where three major world religions live together and on the whole harmoniously. The Mappila being the Muslims of Kerala have played an important and distinctive role in the history of Kerala, and have evolved a separate and distinctive cultural status in the wider Keral society. Secondly although the Malabar coast of Kerala has had a very long trading history with the western part of the Indian Ocean since the Phoenician period, its longest and most sustained links has been with the Arabs in particular. Thirdly, the Mappila (the Muslims of Kerala) "have suddenly emerged as a new force to be contented with in Indian Islam"(Miller, p. xv.). Fourthly and fortunately, through Miller's detailed and insightful account, the Mappila is one of the very few "societies" which has been studied as it evolved through various phases - as it became Islamised, as it struggled to survive and finally as it asserted itself within the modern social and political structure of Kerala.

### Who are the Mappila Muslims?

Two of the most important organizational principles in Indian society are the division or identification of people by religious and linguistic criteria. Ethnicity as an organisational principle plays a very minor role in Indian society, and mostly during long past historical periods. Thus in Kerala, the original Malayali people are divided into Hindus, Christians and Muslims. The Mappilas are that section of the original Malayali people who became Muslims. Within Kerala, the two terms are basically synonymous.