PREFACE

This thesis embodies findings on a taxonomical investigation of a group of lower marine invertebrates belonging to the category coelomata. Bryozoans are well known both in fossil and recent taxonomical history. They comprise of about 5,000 living and 16,000 fossil species. Bryozoans are well known for their taxonomic abundance and structural diversity, representing the various ecological niches ranging from the intertidal to the abyssal benthic. At a time when global marine biological diversity has become a concern of not only to the scientists but also to the policy makers, an understanding of species diversity and abundance are cardinal aspects of biological studies. Geological time scales which is known that by Pre-Cambrian, marine invertebrate diversity reach the maximum and this diversity has become more comprehensive as time advanced. Taxonomists a vanishing species of scientists have become more concerned in discerning patterns of species diversity. The basic tool for this is identification of animals. With this idea in mind a detailed study of taxonomy of bryozoan was undertaken. The major part of this thesis is devoted to describe various species of bryozoans with detailed description and ecotypical variations. The pattern of distribution and abundance which are important aspects of animal groups have also been documented. Possible effects of heavy metal contamination on the tolerance and growth of bryozoans, a few species of which have been eliminated from the chronically polluted areas of Cochin backwaters have also been documented. It is believed that this thesis would help in furthering our knowledge on the biological and ecological diversity of bryozoans.