Chapter 2

Geography, Environment and Political History of the Study Area

This chapter discusses the geographical and environmental features of Kerala particularly of the study area. It also examines the political conditions of the medieval Kerala and discusses about the rulers and their territories that corresponded to the study area.

The present study area termed as ‘South Central Kerala’ in this thesis consists of five districts of the state of Kerala. This region lies on the western slope of the Western Ghats. The Western Ghats and its sloping landscape with a number of west flowing rivers are quite important for the economic activity and have exerted a strong impact in shaping the environmental features of Kerala. The political atmosphere of medieval Kerala was characterized by the active spice trade and colonization by the Portuguese and the Dutch.

2.1 Physiography

Kerala (N 8°15’ to N 12°45’ and E 75° 52’ to E 77° 08’) which lies on the Southwest Coast of India and is a monsoon tropical region flanked on the west by the Arabian Sea and bounded by the Western Ghats on the eastern part. On the basis of the physical features, the state of Kerala divides itself into three natural divisions, namely ‘the low land’ consisting of the coastal area, ‘the midland’ consisting of the surging region east of the low land and the forest clad ‘high land’ on the extreme east (Gurukkal and Varier 1999:32). The hilly eastern portion is formed by the southern section of the Western Ghats. It stretches westwards in gentler slopes and gradually widens into the valleys. The plain succeeds the forest clad uplands. Intersected by numerous rivers and streams, it stretches in a succession of gentle undulations towards a line of back waters on the coast. There are 41 west flowing and 3 east flowing rivers in Kerala. Between the back waters and the sea, is a narrow and long stretch of sand. The topography of the state covers altitude ranging from below the means of sea level to about 3000 m above the means of sea level.
2.2 South Central Kerala

The South-Central Kerala consists of five districts of Thrissur, Ernakulam, Kottayam, Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta. Based on physiography, the South Central Kerala corresponds to the lowland and midland region of Kerala. It consists of a chain of water bodies, locally known as Kayals (backwaters) running parallel to the Arabian Sea (Fig.2.1).

These are mostly interconnected by natural or manmade canals, facilitating internal navigation (Soman 2002: 12). Low land region which is below 8 m elevation, is a low lying plain of varying width with successive stretches of sand bars, beach ridges, barriers, estuaries and back waters. The midland which ranges in elevation from 8 m to 75 m, are intersected by a number of rivers and streams (Gurukal and Varier 1999:32). The Arabian Sea lies all along the western boundary of the districts of Thrissur, Ernakulam and Alappuzha. The Vembanad Lake extends from Alappuzha to Cochin for a distance of 83 km and opens to Arabian Sea in Cochin. It is the largest estuary in Kerala and its width varies from a few hundred m to 15 km. Six major rivers such as Periyar, Muvattupuzha, Meenachil, Manimala, Achankovil and Pampa discharge into the Vembanad Lake (Soman 2002: 15).

2.3 Geology, Rock and Soil

Geologically, the area north of the Achancovil shear zone, up to the southern flank of the Palaghat gap, the rocks are predominantly charnockites, charnockitic gneisses and a variety of other gneisses( Soman 2002: 27). Charnockites and associated gneisses occupy most part of the Western Ghats and the midland regions of Kerala. The present area of research falls in the midland and coastal regions of Central Kerala. The tertiary sedimentary formations of Kerala basin uncomfortably overlie the Precambrian rocks. The tertiary sediments in Kerala consist of three distinct formations namely the Varkala, the Quilon and the Vaikom(Gurukal and Varier1999: 36). Laterite is a notable physiographical feature of Kerala. It is confined to elevations of 600 meters and below, over the pre Cambrian and Tertiary sediments. The residual formation of laterite occurs as a cover over the crystalline rocks and sedimentary rocks in 60% of Kerala’s surface area except the high areas. The thickness of laterite capping in Kerala varies from a few centimetres to 30 m (Gurukal and Varier1999: 36). The most
predominant type of soil is laterite soil, reddish brown to yellowish red in colour, supporting a wide range of crops such as coconut, tapioca, pepper, areca nut, cashew rubber etc (Soman 2002:33).

2.4 River System

There are six west flowing perennial rivers situated in the present area of research and all of them originate from the Western Ghats. These are Chalakudy, Periyar, Muvattupuzha, Meenachil, Manimala and Pamba. Of these, four major rivers like Pamba, Manimala, Meenachil and Muvattupuzha discharge their water directly into Vembanad Lake.

2.4.1 Chalakudy

The river Chalakudy in the north of the study area mostly flows through the district of Thrissur and it is formed by the confluence of five streams originating from Anaimalai hills such as Parambikulam, Kuriakutty, Sholayar, Karappara and Anakayam. All these tributaries rise at an elevation above 470 m (Soman 2002). The 130 km long Chalakkudy River empties into the Periyar at Puthenvelikkara. Major towns located on the riverbank are Chalakkudy, Ambazhkkad, and Annamanada.

2.4.2 Periyar

With a length of 244 km and formed by the confluence of a number of rivulets originating from the Western Ghats, this is the longest river in Kerala. Edamala, Cheruthoni, Mullayar, Muthirappuzha and Perinjankutti are the major tributaries of Periyar. On reaching Aluva, in the low land area, the river splits into two; one flows west to join the Arabian Sea at Munambam and the other flows south to empty into Vembanad Lake (Menon 1965; Soman 2002). The towns such as Kalady Perumbavoor, Aluwaye, Angamaly and Paravur are located on the banks of the river Periyar.

2.4.3 Muvattupuzha

The river Muvattupuzha is formed by the merging of three rivers; Kothayaar, Kaliyaar and Thodupuzhayaar and joining together near Muvattupuzha town in Ernakulam district. The 121 km long river flows towards west and splits into Murunjappuzha and
Ithipuzha and joins the Vembanad Lake (Soman 2002). Major towns located on the banks of the river are Muvattupuzha, Ramamangalam, Piravam, and Vaikam.

2.4.4 Meenachil

The Meenachil is 78 km long, flows through Erattupetta, Palai, Ettumanoor and Kottayam before emptying into the Vembanad Lake. The river is formed by the confluence of several streams originating from the Western Ghats. The general elevation ranges from 77m to 1156 m in the high lands and less than 2 m in the lowlands and 8 m to 68 m in the midlands (Menon 1975; Soman 2002). Major towns located on the banks of Meenachil are Poonjar, Erattupetta, Bhrananganam, Pala, Ettumanoor and Kottayam.

2.4.5 Manimala

The river originates from Tata hills in the Western Ghats and the 90 km long river joins the Pamaba at Neerettupuram before emptying itself into the Vembanad Lake (Menon 1975; Soman 2002). Major towns located on the bank of the river are Peerumedu, Mundakkayam, Manimala, Mallappally and Panthalam.

2.4.6 Pampa

The river Pampa is 176 km long with the catchment area of 2235 square km area (Soman 2002). It originates from Pulachimala of the Peerumedu plate of Western Ghats and formed by the confluence of Kakki, Arudai and Kakkad. It flows through the taluks of Chengannor, Tiruvalla, Karthikappally and Kuttanad of the district of Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha. River Manimala joins to Pamaba in its Nerettupuram branch. The river thereafter flows northwards and falls into the Vembanad Lake through several branches, the important ones being Pallathuruthi, Nedumudi and Muttar (Menon 1975). Major towns located on the bank of the river are Ranni, Kozhenchery, Chengannor, Aranmula, Mannar, Pulinkunnu and Champakkulam.

2.5 Climate and Rainfall

The climate over the state of Kerala is of tropical monsoon type with seasonally excessive rainfall and hot summer. On the basis of hydro-meteorological conditions, four seasons, namely, pre-monsoon or hot weather period (March –May), south west
monsoon (June –September), Northeast monsoon (October- December) and winter (January- February) are identified. The south west monsoon is the principal and primary rainy season which constitutes 75% of the annual rainfall while the northeast monsoon provides a secondary rainy season. The total annual rainfall of the state varies from about 4500 millimetres in the northern Kerala to about 2000 millimetres in the south (Gurukal and Varier 1999).

2.6 Agriculture and Plantations

The midland of Kerala, where the hills are not very steep and the valleys wide, is an area of intensive cultivation. This rich and fertile region contributes most of the agricultural products. The valleys are developed into paddy fields, while the interfluves areas and slopes have different plantations (Prasannakumar 2007). Tea and cardamom plantations extensively dominate the high altitudes, while ginger, pepper, turmeric and other spices flourish at the lower levels. The midland also has rubber cultivation, tapioca and other cash crops.

2.7 The People and Demography

Understanding the demographical structure of the Christian community is significant to analyse the development of Christian settlements and the formation of various denominations. At the end of the nineteenth century, the total Christian population of Kerala was less than a million (Zachariah 2003). It was based on the data provided by the censuses of Travancore State, Cochin State and Madras Presidency. However the earliest reliable data was given by Lieutenants Ward and Conner as part of their geographical and topographical surveys of Travancore and Cochin states. The survey was completed by the end of 1820. The survey states that the total population of both Cochin and Travancore state was 1,127,790. It also states Christian population comprising of every denomination in Cochin and Travancore state to be 1, 55,693 (Ward and Conner 1994: 48; 121).

A very similar statistics was provided by Stephan Neil in his work on ‘A history of Christianity in India 1707-1858’. In the year 1838, there were seventy two churches with Christian population of 76,000 in the diocese of Cranganore and forty two churches with 32,000 followers in the Vicariate of Serra. The word ‘Serra’ found in the Portuguese writing denotes the mountain regions of Malabar (Malekandathil 2003;
2010). The diocese of Cranganore and vicariate of Serra were the only two administrative centres of Christians of Malabar during that period.

It also gives an approximate figure of 40,000 independent Christians of Syrian tradition (Neil 1985: 237). It is interesting to note that the Christian population of Kerala has been increased drastically over the last two centuries (Fig 2.2). Based on the census data 2011, the total population of the state of Kerala is 33406061. Hindus constitute 54.72 (18282492) per cent, with Muslims accounting for 26.56 (8873472) per cent and Christians 18.38 (6141269) per cent of total population of the state. Christian population of the state have largely concentrated in the central part of Kerala. The core of the Christian population is concentrated in the districts of Thrissur, Ernakulam, Kottayam, Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta. These five districts represent the present study area and constitute 61.15 percentage of total Christian population of the state of Kerala (Fig.2.3).

2.8 Political History of Medieval Kerala

The picture of the political condition of Kerala at the arrival of the Portuguese was notable with the presence of the several chieftains and petty kings. The rise of these chieftains was as the result of the disintegration of the Chera Empire of Mahodayapuram in the 12th century of the C.E (Elamkulam 1970; Menon 2008; Veluthat 1999). Therefore the political authority in medieval Kerala was based on the organization of a large number of small territorial units or princely states. Some of these autonomous territories gradually became powerful by conquering the neighbouring principalities. Political environment in Kerala was fragmented at the arrival of the Portuguese on the Malabar Coast. Contemporary records mention more than thirty chiefs -big and small - by name, of which some were called Swarupam (Sudhakaran 1999: 228). At the time of the arrival of Vasco da Gama, there was a political balance in Malabar centred on Calicut. The four independent kingdoms in Malabar were Kolathunad at Cannanore, Zamurins at Calicut, Perumbadapu Swarupam at Cochin and Venad at Quilon. But the pre-eminence was for Calicut. All the other kings were under the Zamorins who never allowed anyone other than the kings of Cannanore and Quilon to mint coins or tile their houses (John 2003: 137). Most of the lesser chiefs were in traditional subordination to one or the other major chiefs. Calicut became the most powerful rulers of Kerala towards the close of the 15th
century C.E and by the time of the arrival of the Portuguese at Calicut, maritime trade over the Arabian sea was the monopoly of the Muslims- the Arabs, the Turks, the Sindhis, the Guajarati’s and the Konkan Muslims (Sudhakaran 1999: 229).

2.9 Political Powers in South Central Kerala

There were several princely states in the inland territories as well as the coastal regions in central Kerala at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese. These rulers of inland territories were controlling the spice production centres and markets (Fig.2.4). The political geography of present area of research at the time of the Portuguese was divided among various petty principalities such as Cranganore, Parur, Edappally, Cochin, Vadakkumkur, Thekkumkur, Purakkad and Kayamkulam (George 1975; Mathew 1983). There were several minor rulers like Mangattu (Alengattu), Anchaikaimal, Meenachil, Punjar and Pantalam. Initially Cochin was a minor principality and became prominent with the support of the Portuguese. It was through the Portuguese that the king of Cochin had become powerful and several other smaller princely states in the central part of Kerala were brought under him.

2.9.1 Cranganore

The town of Cranganore, is situated on the bank of estuary of the river Periyar and was under a ruler who, as circumstances favoured, sided either with the Zamorins or with the king of Cochin. The rulers Cranganore consider themselves as the descendants of Kshatriya chief, who escort Rajendra Chola when he attacked Thiruvanchikkulam in 11th century C.E (George 1975). At the time of the arrival of the Portuguese, it was considered a place where plenty of pepper was available and as the centre of the Christians of St. Thomas. It lay in between the kingdoms of Calicut and Cochin (Mathew 1983).

2.9.2 Cochin

The early history of Cochin is not much known. According to the tradition, the rulers of Cochin belonged to Perumpadapuswarupam. They were initially based at Venneri in the north Kerala as local chiefs and migrated to the Cochin region in the 14th century C.E. The town of Cochin is situated at the outlet of the great Vembanad Lake in the Arabian Sea. The kingdom of Cochin was comparatively small and comprised of the
town of Cochin and the area of Vypin, probably extending up to Purakkad or Chempakassery. However, the port of Cochin was a flourishing trading centre which had relations with the merchants from Coromandel, Cambay, Dabul and Chaul.

The kingdom of Cochin stretched along the coast from Cranganore in the north to Purakkad in the south, and included the territories of nine subordinate kings in its territory (Disney 2010; 10). Subordinated to the king of Cochin, there were certain Kaimals and Kartas. There is a mention of the Kaimals of Mangattu (Alengattu) and Karta of Alwaye in the Portuguese writings as recipients of the annuities given by the Portuguese factory at Cochin. Melcattur is also mentioned as a small principality probably under the king of Cochin (Mathew 1983; 6).

2.9.3 Edappally

It emerged after the decline of the Kulasekhara Empire in 1102 C.E. and founded by a Nambudiri Brahmin (George 1975). The ruler of Edappally had good relation with the Zamorins. Its territory included the regions like Punithura and Tripunithura and principality of Edappally itself (Mathew 1983; 6).

2.9.4 Vadakkumkur

The kingdom was bounded on the west by the Vembanad Lake, on the east by Poonjar, on the north by Kothamangalam, and on south by territories of Thekkumkur. Important towns like Vaduthala, Chempu, Vaikam, Mannar, Vechoor and Kudavechoor were belonged to the principality of Vadakenkur (Malekandathil 1998). Since large quantity of pepper was collected from the area of Vadakkumkur, Portuguese named it Reyno da Pimenta. The ruler of the principality was a recipient of annuities from the Portuguese factory at Cochin (Mathew 1983; 6). The Vadakkumkur royal family had a number of branches at various places and the king was selected from among the senior most members of all of these branches. They shifted their capital to different places at different periods depending upon the king and his family branch. They continued to be the major spice producing inland rulers even at the time of the Dutch. The treaty between the Dutch and the king was made on 12th March 1665 and according to the agreement the pepper and cinnamon produced will be sold exclusively to the Dutch on paying the established duties (Poonan 1948). It was later annexed and merged with Travancore by Marthanda Varma in 1750.
2.9.5 Parur

The area of this principality shared boundary with Vadakkumkur and the ruler also was a beneficiary of the annuity granted by the Portuguese. They continued to be powerful during the time of the Dutch.

2.9.6 Purakkad

They were also known as Chempakassery rulers. The area of Kuttanad and Ambalapuzha taluks of the modern district of Alappuzha and region of Kudamalloor in the present district of Kottayam belonged to the ruler of Purakkad (George 1975; Mathew 1983). The territory corresponded to this regions was known to the Portuguese by the name Porca. It had a stone ware house of the Dutch, which was set up after a contract was signed with the king of Purakkad. The Dutch treaty with the king was made on 14th March 1663 (Poonan 1948; Singh 2007; 27).

2.9.7 Thekkumkur

The modern taluks of Thiruvalla, Changanassery and Kottayam constituted the principality of Thekkumkur. The Portuguese succeeded in securing the goodwill of the ruler (name of the ruler is not known) of Thekkenkur by granting the annuities (Mathew 1983; 6). The territories of Thekkumkur were the major spice producing centres during the period of the Portuguese and the Dutch. Kanjirappally, an interior part of this territory, was one of the greatest centres of pepper. They had shifted their capital from Vennimala and Manikandapuram to Nettasseri and finally in the out skirts of Kottayam (George 1975). Thekkumkur was annexed by Marthanda Varma of Travancore in 1750.

2.9.8 Kayamkulam

The territories of the ruler of Kayamkulam consisted of Karthikappally, Karunagappally, Mavelikkara and Chengannoor taluks with their capital at Kandiyarmattom (George 1975). The Dutch obtained pepper, cinnamon, arecanut, dry cow hides, wood work and lead from Kayamkulam (Poonan 1948).
2.10 Portuguese Trade and the Malabar Coast

Fleets of Vasco Da Gama reached Kappad, about 13 km north of Calicut on 20th May, 1498 and it was the first step of the Portuguese diplomacy to enter the Calicut spice trade on the Malabar Coast. The next attempt to establish diplomatic relation with Malabar Coast was made in 1500 when Pedro Alvares Cabral reached Cochin on December 24th 1500 (Mathew 1983; 49). Portuguese were allowed to establish a factory at Cochin and the King of Cochin wanted to utilize the Portuguese support to free Cochin from the patronage of Zamorins. The first Portuguese fortress was established in Cochin in 1503. They also have built fortress in Cannanore (1508), Quilon (1519) and Cranganore (1536) to control and monitor the spice trade of the entire maritime zone of Malabar (Malekandathil 2010; 89).

Portuguese had relations with other local chieftains in the hinterland. They managed to bring all the petty lords under their friendship through the ingenious distribution of annuities and thereby, the recipients were obliged to see that the pepper and other spices were not carried away to any other places other than the Portuguese factories (Mathew 1983; 57). Pepper and other spices were mainly produced in the territories of the rulers of Purakkad, Thekkumkur, Vadakkumkur, Paravur, Diamper, Alangad and Karta of Alwaye of the central part of Kerala.

King of Cochin was given an annual annuity amounting to 640 cruzados and a golden crown. The rulers of Vadakkumkur, Thekkumkur, Alengadu, Paravur, Diamper, as well as Porcad were given 72,000 reais (Portuguese coin) each and the Karta of Alwaye an amount of 42,000 reais per annum in return for their help in supplying spices to the Portuguese factory at Cochin (Malekandathil 2010; 96). Pepper was the important item exported from Malabar Coast. For instance, out of the 157,377 kilograms of spices exported in four ships in 1501, about 104,918 kilograms were pepper (Fig. 2.5).

2.11 The Dutch and Political Geography

Dutch was the first European nation to question the trade monopoly of the Portuguese in the Malabar Coast. The Dutch took the control of Quilon in 1661 and captured the Portuguese colonies at Cochin and Cranganore in 1663 (Poonen 1948). The United East India Company, popularly known by its Dutch acronym Verenigde Oost-Indische
Compagnie (VOC), was established on 30th March 1602 (Singh 2007: 12). The administrative head quarter of the Dutch East India Company in the East was at Batavia (Koshy 2001: 480). The Portuguese supremacy of spice trade in the Malabar Coast was ended by the Dutch. They defeated and captured Portuguese stronghold regions of Malabar Coast. The Dutch conquered Portuguese forts like Quilon in 1661, Cranganore in 1662 and Cochin in 1663 and the administration process of Malabar was placed in charge of a commander. The political geography of Malabar and the princely states in the inland regions during the Dutch period was more or less the same as that of the Portuguese.

A fuller list of the Malabar states and rulers is given by Van Rheede in his memoirs of Malabar in 1677 (Poonan 1948: 34). The rulers of Cochin were the major powers in the central Kerala and there were several rulers in the inland regions who were submissive to the king of Cochin. They were Kings of, Moutan, Vadakkumkur, Thekkumkur, Parur, Rapolim or Edappally, Parur and Alangatt. The policy of the Dutch East India Company towards Kerala varied from time to time. Six different periods and policies can be identified; (1) from 1604 to 1657, (2) from 1657 to 1663, (3) from 1663 to 1697, (4) from 1697 to 1717, (5) from 1717 to 1753 and (6) from 1753 to 1795 (Koshy 2001: 482). Dutch East India Company succeeded in obtaining support from the local rulers against the Portuguese during the 1604 to 1657. The second period witnessed the conquering of the Portuguese fortresses at various places of Malabar Coast. In the third phase from 1663 to 1697 the Dutch East India Company adopted different strategies to gain monopoly of trade by signing treaties between the rulers of Cochin and other inland powers. A treaty was prepared between the king of Cochin and the Dutch company on 20th March, 1663 that the pepper and other commodities produced in the inland regions of the subordinate rulers of Cochin shall be delivered exclusively to the Dutch factory in Cochin (Poonen 1948; 118) (Fig.2.6).

The Dutch made various treaties with inland rulers like Vadakkumkur, Thekkumkur, Porcad, and Mangatte for their support and also for their spices produced in their region. The nature of trade and the movement of pepper and other commodities towards the Dutch factory in Cochin were similar to that of the Portuguese period. The local markets and the internal trade routes remain unchanged and continued their
role during the time of the Dutch and the English (Jose 2015: 561). During the period from 1697 to 1717 Company made alterations in the forts at Cochin and Cranganore. They spent huge amount of money for the military establishments. The size of the fortifications at Cochin and Cranganore had been reduced. Dutch were successful in maintaining their strength during the war against the Zamorins in 1715. The period from 1717 to 1753 witnessed a gradual decline of the Dutch trade in Malabar Coast due to the surfacing of Marthanda Varma of Travancore as a powerful ruler. As a result, there was a shortage of pepper from the inland rulers. The Travancore ruler had annexed the territories of the Thekkumkur and Vadakkumkur in 1750, who were the main suppliers of pepper and other spices to Cochin.

2.12 Political and Economic Background for Religious Developments

In the political history of Kerala the period from the sixteenth to the close of the eighteenth century stands out for its complexity and change of momentum. This is the span of time which is marked out by the coming of the Portuguese on one end and the takeover of the political power by the English on the other (Cherian 1999). It also witnessed the political alliance of Europeans with the regional powers. The economic environment of medieval Kerala was characterised with active trade of the Portuguese and the Dutch, development of new ports and forts, markets, production centres and trade routes. Though there were other ports, Cochin was the chief centre for both the Portuguese and the Dutch. The production centres and the markets were moreover same. Major productions of the Malabar were the pepper, ginger, clove, cinnamon, cardamom, nutmeg and sandalwood. Of these, pepper was the most demanded spice among them and substantial volumes of pepper was exported from Malabar Coast during the time of the Portuguese and the Dutch.

The religious policy of the Portuguese missionaries and other West Asian prelates mainly took place within such political and economic environment. At the time of the arrival of the Portuguese, the Christian community were powerful and prosperous with the lion share of the pepper trade in their hands (Malekandathil 1998). Their settlement concentrated not only close to the Coastal towns but also in the interiors, mainly to the pepper production regions. The Christians of various divisions were actively involved in the trade activities during the time of the Dutch. The Christians who lived in the territory of Vadakkumkur and Thekkumkur were the prominent
suppliers of pepper to VOC in Cochin (Rajendran 1991; 245). The local chieftains of the regions had economically benefited by the trade transactions with the Portuguese and the Dutch. Thus the religious development and the construction of the Churches in south central Kerala is interlinked with political and economic conditions prevailed during that period.

The spices cultivated in the interior regions which were under the jurisdiction of the local powers. Important towns in the interior of Cochin from where pepper was collected were Kanjirappally, Erumely, Erattupetta, Chirakkadavu, Thodupuzha, Paravur, Edappally, Diamper, Alangattu and Alwaye (Mathew 1983, Malekandathil 1998 and Jose 2015). The cultivation of the spices was in the catchment area of these towns. The rivers flow from the Ghats to the low land region provides easy transportation for traders. Inter connected channels of lakes in the low land region were also used for the internal navigation. The towns in the interior were accessed through the river routes as well as the land routes in between the rivers (Fig.2.7).

The economic landscape of the 17th and 18th century C.E is further illustrated with finding of stone structures locally known as Chumadutangi, Athani or Elappu. It is a bench shaped structure in which a horizontal stone block is erected on two pillars and was constructed for the traders (Jose 2015). Several stone benches have been noticed at various places across the study area. It is constructed for the traders who carry the goods on their heads for long distance. The traders could easily lay down their luggage on it and take out. They are mostly found on the track between the rivers as well as the areas where bullock carts were not used. (Jose 2015). The inscriptions found on them confirm their antiquity to the middle of 18th century. The tradition of erecting such stone benches continued until 20th century. The political and economical circumstance that was existed during the medieval period had created way for the religious development. The European and several numerous West Asian prelates were also penetrated into these regions under the political protection of the Portuguese and the Dutch.

Geographical location of this region along with several rivers, lake and estuaries were favourable for inland transportation of goods. The rivers, lakes and the estuaries connect to most of the important places in the region and till today, water transport is one of the important means of communications and transportation in this part. That
was probably the advantage and the foreign traders exploited it. Hence we see some of
the ports sites and forts are located in the hinterland. Unlike other regions, Kerala was
one the most active trading region because of its spices. This was because of the
natural environment, the climatic conditions, the humidity, the lateritic soil coverage,
the hill slopes and the native flora such as pepper, ginger, clove, cinnamon and
cardamom. It facilitated the great degree of production of spices. Probably, when the
demand probably increased, because of the trading activities many communities and
farmers took serious efforts in growing large quantities of such products.

This part of Kerala as has been mentioned above was very active not only for the
trading activities but also for the local political activities and settlements of western
traders like the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British. The political atmosphere
reveals that the region was ruled by several small principalities such as Cranganore,
Parur, Edappally, Alengattu, Cochin, Vadakkumkur, Thekkumkur, Purakkad and
Kayamkulam. It seems, individually they were not powerful initially to dominate the
total political scenario and which stand western traders dictums. This situation not
only leads to the monopoly of Westerners in spice trade but also in taking control over
the production, prices, storage and transportation. This probably set to close contact
with influential people, different ethnic groups and communities who were probably
came under some influence of Christianity, who otherwise was not probably adhesive
of a particular sects or branch or religious pertaining to the contemporary India. This
probably laid both way of facilitating economic interactions and religious activities.