

CHAPTER-I

IMPORTANCE OF LOCATION IN PENINSULAR INDIA

Kerala, the southern most state of India occupies a unique position on the map of the country. With the southernmost extremity at Parassala about 56 kms. up from the lands end of India, it stretches along the shores of Arabian Sea for a distance of about 580 kms with Karnataka State on the North and North-east and Tamil Nadu State on the East and South. The breadth of the State varies from 32 kms in the extreme North and South to over 120 kms. in the middle. It is hemmed between the mighty Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea. Kerala State lies between 8°.17' 30" and 12° 47' 40" north latitudes and 74° 51' and 77° 24' 47" east longitudes. The State is bounded on the North and North-east by South Kanara, Kudagu and Mysore districts of Karnataka State, on the East by Nilgiris, Coimbatore, Madurai, Ramanathapuram and Tirunelveli districts of Tamil Nadu, on the south by Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu and on the west by the Arabian sea. The area of the State is 38,863 sq.kms. Kerala ranks seventeenth in area among the 22 States of India. The area of the State works out to 1.19% of the total area of the country.

According to the 1981 census, Kerala has a population of 25, 403, 217 persons of whom 12,487,981 are males and 12,915,256 females. The population of the State is 3.71% of the population of India. One out of every 27 Indians and

one out of every 173 humans in the world is a Keralite. Considering the size of the population the position of Kerala is twelfth among the 22 States in India.

The geographical position of Kerala as the narrow strip of land hemmed in between the Western Ghats on the one side and the Arabian Sea on the other has considerably influenced the course of its history. The State has from the dawn of history enjoyed a kind of insularity, which has given it welcome immunity from the political convulsions, which shook Northern India. Kerala seldom felt the impact of the many foreign invasions that took place in the northern part of India from across the border. It took longer time for Aryanism, Buddhism and Jainism from the north to penetrate into Kerala than into the other parts of Peninsular India. Kerala was also able to evolve its own way of life and social institutions unhampered by excessive interference from outside. This factor has helped the growth of peculiar social institutions like the Marumakkathayam or the matrilineal system of inheritance, polyandry, etc., in Kerala. Even Brahmins and Muslims who as a rule follow everywhere the Makkathayam or patrilineal system of inheritance have Marumakkathayis among them in Kerala, viz., the Nambudiris of Payyannur Gramam and the Mappilas of North Malabar, Kerala could also evolve its own distinctive styles of art and architecture which are in many respects different from those in other parts of India. Such arts as Chakiar Kuthu, Kathakali, Mohini Attam and Ottam Tullal developed in Kerala in an atmosphere of splendid isolation.

Kerala's contacts with the Roman Empire and other foreign countries had started from the ancient times itself. These contacts were mainly centred on trading activities and cultural contacts. The remains of Teak wood found at Mohanjo daro and the Harappan seals found at south India have made some historians to assume that Kerala had maintained trade relations with the Harappans through sea. The same type of arguments have been put forward by some historians to assume that Kerala had maintained trade relations with Egypt and Sumeria in the ancient times on the basis of some of the material remains found there. However, the existence of Roman trade with Kerala during the ancient period has been proved beyond doubt. Similarly, Kerala had