

Chumaduthangi (Load Relieving Stones) of Thalappilly Taluk in Thrissur District, Kerala, India

ARYA P. N., ANANTHU V. DEV, RAJESH S. V. AND ABHAYAN G. S

Introduction

The *Chumaduthangi* (Load Relieving Stone) is a stone structure on which the passengers who carry loads on their heads place them and take relief while travelling long distances during ancient times when there were no active vehicles for transportation (Nagamaiya 1999). *Chumaduthangi* also stands as an evidence of ancient trade system that can be seen in different parts of Kerala. These stones are known by various names such as *Athani*, *Elappu*, *Thangikkallu*, *Unnukallu*, *Athanikkallu* and *Moonnukallu* (Jose 2015). *Athani* is more frequently used term in northern and central Kerala. They are mainly located in association with markets, river courses, trade routes and areas where agricultural products and economically important articles are sourced. The explorations in Thalappilly taluk, Thrissur district have revealed 76 *Chumaduthangi* and two *Vazhiyamabalam* (resting place for the travellers) (Table 1). This article attempts to discuss the characteristic features and role of *Chumaduthangi* in the trade network of late medieval period (c. 15th to 18th century AD).

Study Area

Thalappilly is the largest taluk in Thrissur district, Kerala which shares border with Malappuram and Palakkad districts (Fig.1). Bharathapuzha and its southern tributary Gayathripuzha which originate in the Anamalai Hills in Tamil Nadu together form the major river system of this area.

These rivers flow through the parts of Thrissur and Palakkad districts. Its confluence with Bharathapuzha, the river Gayathripuzha is known as Cheerakuzhipuzha (Fig. 2) (Menon 2000). Majority of the *Chumaduthangi* are located on the banks of Bharathapuzha and Gayathripuzha and these places are noted for their strong agricultural tradition.

History of Thalappilly

The cultural history of Thalappilly starts from the Megalithic period. The explorations yielded 92 Megalithic burials such as urns, cists, dolmens, rock cut caves, umbrella stones, hat stones and hood stones. During the Sangam age present Thrissur district including Thalappilly came under the sway of early Chera Empire. The history of the study area from the 9th to the 12th centuries AD is the history of Kulasekharas of Mahodayapuram. The history since the 12th century AD is associated with the history of the rise and growth of Perumpadappu Swarupam which later became the Cochin dynasty. In the 14th and 15th centuries AD, the Zamorin occupied this area. After the arrival of Portuguese in 1498, the area came under various foreign powers such as the Dutch and the British. Meanwhile, some minor kingdoms or principalities had existed in Thalappilly and that played an equally significant role in the politics of Kerala. Thalappilly was one of the minor kingdoms or principalities under the rulers of Cochin. The Thalappilly kingdom (Gurukkal and Varier 1999) (*Siroviharam* in Sanskrit) comprised

the whole of the present Thalappilly taluk and the coastal region from Ponnani to Chettuva. It included places such as Guruvayur, Kunnamkulam and Wadakkancherry. The Thalappilly kingdom consisted of four branches such as Ainikkur, Punnathur, Manakkulam and Kakkad and the chiefs of the four branches were collectively known as Thalappilly Rajas. The Punnathur branch separated itself from the collateral branches even as early as the 15th century AD and joined the side of the Zamorin against the Cochin ruler while the Ainikkur and Manakkulam branches were generally on the side of the Cochin. The Kakkad branch became extinct in the 18th century AD and the power shifted to other three families equally. Mullurkkara, an estate belongs to Paliath Achan (the minister of the Cochin rulers) also formed the part of Thalappilly kingdom (Menon 2007). At the time of the reorganisation of districts Thalappilly region became part of Thrissur on 1st July 1949 (Menon 1962).

Features of *Chumaduthangi*

In Thalappilly *chumaduthangi* is mostly made out of charnockite rock but laterite stones can also be seen. Architecturally it resembles a stone bench or table i.e.; one or two dressed rectangular horizontal slabs placed on two or three dressed rectangular vertical stone pillars (Figs. 3 and 4). The tallest among them has a height of 2m and the longest among them has a length of 5.5m. During the exploration only one *Chumaduthangi* made of laterite was found in broken condition (Fig. 5). Most of the *Chumaduthangi* contain inscriptions, simple artworks and symbols on them. Most common symbol is that of a flower (Figs. 6 and 7). It has been found at the edges or at the centre of the horizontal slab. Fingers pointing towards left and right sides of the inscription are present

in the structure at Thichur (Fig. 8). In some of the *Chumaduthangi* one side of the horizontal slab has

a semi curved portion (Fig. 8) and the purpose of the same is apparently for decoration. Rarely present small conical step like projections on the vertical pillars seem to be meant for climbing on top of the horizontal block (Fig. 9).

Inscriptions

It was seen that 34 *Chumaduthangi* have small inscriptions and many of these are legible. The inscriptions are engraved on horizontal stone blocks and the script used is the old Malayalam (Fig. 6). These valuable sources provide information about the year, month, name of the donor, name of his/her house and lineage. It was observed that the donors are mostly men. In some instances, name of females can be seen, which indicate that particular structure was erected by or on behalf of a lady whose name is inscribed on it. According to popular belief in early times, such donations were made by woman for avoiding risks during pregnancy (Jenee Peter: Personal communication). From the donor's names mentioned in the inscriptions it is noted that in Thalappilly, the *Chumaduthangi* were erected by the Hindu community only. In other places of Thrissur district constructions by the Christians and Muslims can also be seen.

The inscriptions (Table 1) also mention the name of the family who ruled that particular area. The *Chumaduthangi* from Irunilamkode in Mullurkkara clearly mentions the name Paliyam in the inscription. Mullurkkara was a part of Thalappilly kingdom and belonged to Paliath family. In the inscriptions all the years are mentioned in *Kollam* era (K.E.). Old Malayalam numerals as well as Arabic numerals have been used. A few of the

Chumaduthangi devoid of inscriptions seem to be of earlier origin. The year on the *Chumaduthangi* at Anthimahakalankavu is 1024 K.E., i.e., 1849 AD. This is the earliest date from Thalappilly taluk among the legible inscriptions of *Chumaduthangi*. The year mentioned in the *Chumaduthangi* from Choolipadam is 1060 K.E., i.e., 1885 AD (Fig.10). Other years mentioned on various *Chumaduthangi* are 1090 K.E., 1103 K.E., 1104 K.E., 1108 K.E., 1110 K.E., 1112 K.E. and 1121 K.E. (1915 AD, 1928 AD, 1929 AD, 1933 AD, 1935 AD, 1937 AD and 1946 AD respectively). Based on the available dates *Chumaduthangi* from the study area can be roughly dated from 1849 AD to 1946 AD. Though, the evidence from other parts of Kerala suggest an earlier date to the similar structures i.e. beginning of 18th century AD.

Associated Structures

In Thalappilly taluk, majority of the *Chumaduthangi* are found alone in most of the areas, while two are found in associated with *Vazhiyambalam*, locally known as *Thanneer panthal*. One is located at Chelakkara and the other at Pazhayannur. The *Vazhiyambalam* is a structure made of bricks and laterite blocks, to be used as a resting place for the people who travel long distances and carry commodities. It is a single roomed structure with two pillared veranda and a gabled roof. These were constructed and maintained by the upper class families or royal families of the respective periods. The oral tradition says that the travellers kept their luggage on *Chumaduthangi* and took rest in the *Vazhiyambalam*, where they could get drinking water and refreshments like butter milk. In the study area, the *Vazhiyambalam* look like small residential structures and they appear to be renovated and hence appear much later in date. The *Vazhiyambalam* at Chelakkara is partially

collapsed (Fig. 11). The other one located at Pazhayannur (Fig. 12) is presently functional during the festival at Pazhayannur Bagavathi temple. The *Chumaduthangi* are also found associated with *Karinkalthotty*, a basin like vessel made out of a single granite stone block. It was apparently used to provide water for domestic animals such as cattle. *Karinkalthotty* was reported from Vadakkethara and Pazhayannur.

Trade

The study area is one of the richest paddy producing centres of the state (Menon 2000). Excess production of food grains and crops necessitated the exchange of commodities. Thiruvilwamala and Kuthampully in Thalappilly taluk are well known handloom weaving centres. Kuthampully area is inhabited almost entirely by the *Chelans* or *Devanga Chettis* from Mysore, who left their native place due to Tippu's persecution and settled in this remote village by the end of the 18th century AD. Almost all of them were weavers. Production of clothes in the beginning was mainly for local use. The rapid development of this industry marked advancement in trade activity in the particular area (Menon 1962). The *Chettiyar* settlement is also noticed in the Chelakkara- Pazhayannur- Thiruvilwamala- Kondazhi belt. They were mainly traders engaged in oil production, pottery production and agriculture. Many of them own agricultural lands and are highly entrepreneurial. Trading activities followed by *Chettiyars* could be a reason for the presence of more *Chumaduthangi* in this particular area.

The exchange of commodities from paddy fields and small markets was conducted most probably through rivers. The *Chumaduthangi* constructed at regular distances indicate that the

study area was on the trade route. Probably there were also day markets and evening markets on this trade route. The rivers Bharathapuzha and Gayathripuzha connect Thalappilly taluk with the parts of Palakkad such as Shoranur, Ottapalam, Lakkidi, Nenmara and Alathur (Menon 2002). The presence of *Chumaduthangi* is noted in the areas of Pazhayannur leading to Alathur. Nenmara is lying adjacent to Tamil Nadu. At Painkulam Thiruvanchikuzhi, Vazhalipadam and Thozhupadam *Chumaduthangi* are located at regular intervals. Shoranur in Palakkad district is very near to this region. The trade relations through and across the river probably connected these areas. At Kunnankulam, where once the market was very active, *Chumaduthangi* can be seen in the town itself. Kunnankulam is situated near the famous harbour of Ponnani in Malappuram District.

Distribution

The *Chumaduthangi* are distributed all over the Thalappilly taluk (Table 1). The Charnockite group of rocks are abundant in the present study area (Fig. 13) and majority of *Chumaduthangi* are made of the same. *Chumaduthangi* are also present over the other geological formations such as Sand and Silt, Migmatite complex Permatite/Aplite/Quartz vein and basic rocks. It is clear that the maximum numbers of *Chumaduthangi* are located in the gravelly clay and loam types of soil (Fig. 14). Some are present in the clay and sandy soils. Thalappilly taluk falls in low land, midland and high land area (Soman 2002). They are mainly distributed over the lowland (10-300m above MSL) and midland (300-600m above MSL) region and a few are noticed in highland (600-1800m above MSL) area (Fig. 15).

Table 1: List of *Chumaduthangi* and *Vazhiyambalam* in Thalappilly Taluk

SL, No.	Site Name	Village	Measurement in cm (Length x Height x Breadth)	Latitude	Longitude	Inscription	Remarks
1	Anthimahakal ankavu	Chelakkara	380x165x39	N10°40.892'	E076°20.983'	—	Three pil-lared
2	Arakkamala	Thiruvil-wamala	Cannot be taken	N10°42.526'	E076°26.128'	—	Two pillared
3	Arthat	Kunnankulam	555x70x50	N10°38.249'	E076°02.393'	"Mallisseri Krishnan Nam-boothiri vaka"	Three pil-lared
4	Athanimoola	Mayannur	373x155x36	N10°44.439'	E076°22.978'	—	Three pil-lared
5	Attoor	Attoor	500x120x36	N10°43.103'	E076°17.074'	"25.9.1110 Kullambil Kittunni vaka"	Three pil-lared
6	Attoor	Mullurkkara	295x135x35	N10°42.047'	E076°17.731'	—	Three pil-lared
7	Chelakkara	Chelakkara	Cannot be taken	N10°41.656'	E076°20.285'	—	Vazhiyambalam
8	Chelakkara	Chelakkara	322x133x43	N10°41.656'	E076°20.285'	—	Three pil-lared

9	Chelakkode	Chelakkode	153x90x55	N10°41.420'	E076°22.486'	—	Two pillared
10	Choolipadam	Elanad	150x138x33	N10°37.627'	E076°25.469'	—	Two pillared
11	Desamangalam	Desamangalam	268x111x35	N10°44.417'	E076°11.995'	—	Three pillared
12	East Pampady	Pampady	245x160x30	N10°44.749'	E076°27.083'	—	Two pillared
13	Eravathody	Kaniarkode	140x110x35	N10°43.471'	E076°24.603'	—	Two pillared, Broken
14	Eravathody Lakshamveedu	Kaniarkode	500x140x40	N10°44.109'	E076°24.842'	—	Three pillared
15	Eyyal	Eyyal	110x40x35	N10°39.417'	E076°07.475'	—	Broken
16	Eyyal Parappuram	Eyyal	165x35x35	N10°39.616'	E076°07.327'	—	Broken
17	Irunilamkode	Mullurkkara	195x185x35	N10°42.665'	E076°15.453'	"1104 Edavam 9 Chembath Govindamenon Paliyam vaka"	Three pillared, Broken
18	Kalleepadam	Pazhayannur	337x145x30	N10°41.003'	E076°25.983'	—	Three pillared
19	Kariyannur	Kariyannur	Cannot be taken	N10°40.05'	E076°09.074'	—	Broken
20	Kattilakkavu	Panjali	340x125x35	N10°42.971'	E076°18.271'	"Korattikkara Savithri Pathi-namaadiyude smarakam"	Three pillared
21	Kayampoovam	Chelakkode	300x100x27	N10°41.422'	E076°23.066'	—	Three pillared
22	Kayarampaara	Thiruvilwamala	270x150x40	N10°44.467'	E076°24.661'	—	Two pillared
23	Kollaykkal	Pampady	180x115x35	N10°44.776'	E076°27.899'	—	Two pillared
24	Kootupaata	Thiruvilwamala	235x195x45	N10°42.895'	E076°25.708'	"Pandaarakalam vaka"	Three pillared, Broken
25	Malesamangalam	Thiruvilwamala	175x127x33	N10°44.019'	E076°26.231'	—	Two pillared
26	Manalady	Attoor	340x93x35	N10°42.508'	E076°18.417'	"1103 "	Three pillared, Broken
27	Mangulam	Kondazhi	360x110x33	N10°45.654'	E076°22.233'	—	Three pillared
28	Mayannur Palimukku	Kondazhi	410x160x37	N10°44.165'	E076°23.575'	—	Three pillared
29	Naduthara	Varavoor	343x142x35	N10°43.286'	E076°13.459'	"Kaladi Krishnan Nair"	Three pillared
30	Oralassery	Kaniarkode	175x127x33	N10°44.109'	E076°24.842'	—	Three pillared
31	Paalachuvadu	Killimangalam	374x165x32	N10°43.259'	E076°20.603'	—	Three pillared

32	Painkulam School	Painkulam	210X115	N10°44.795'	E076°17.931'	—	Three pillared, Broken
33	Painkulam Thiruvanchikuzhi	Painkulam	370x55x35	N10°44.833'	E076°18.737'	" <i>Therinch Thattan Vaka</i> "	Three pil-lared
34	Painkulam Thiruvanchikuzhi	Painkulam	378x140x34	N10°44.828'	E076°18.756'	—	Three pil-lared
35	Painkulam Thiruvanchikuzhi	Painkulam	110(Height)	N10°44.814'	E076°18.776'	—	Broken
36	Pallam	Nedumpura	337x60x37	N10°44.665'	E076°15.384'	—	Two pillared
37	Pallimukku	Kondazhi	175x135x35	N10°44.112'	E076°23.729'	" <i>1118 Thulam 28 Thekkekuruvathe vaka</i> "	Two pillared
38	Pampady	Pampady	420x90x38	N10°44.744'	E076°25.747'	—	Three pil-lared
39	Parakkad	Venganellur	194x100x30	N10°42.741'	E076°20.620'	—	Two pillared
40	Paramelpadi	Kondazhi	230x110x35	N10°43.452'	E076°23.562'	—	Three pil-lared
41	Paramelpadi	Kondazhi	320x155x35	N10°43.767'	E076°23.883'	—	Three pillared, Broken
42	Pattiparambu	Thiruvil-wamala	168x126x37	N10°42.441'	E076°26.688'	—	Two pillared
43	Pazhayannur	Pazhayannur	180x115x40	N10°41.956'	E076°25.816'	—	Two pillared
44	Pazhayannur	Pazhayannur	365x140x36	N10°41.067'	E076°25.644'	—	Three pillared, Broken
45	Pazhayannur	Pazhayannur	380x100x36	N10°41.098'	E076°25.497'	—	Three pil-lared
46	Pazhayottumuri	Vellarakkadu	Cannot be taken	N10°40.902'	E076°08.580'	—	Two pillared, Broken
47	Pilakkode	Pilakkode	Cannot be taken	N10°40.321'	E076°21.733'	—	Broken
48	Pilakkode	Pilakkode	207x150x33	N10°40.764'	E076°21.723'	—	Three pil-lared
49	Poovathani	Venganellur	367x121x34	N10°43.343'	E076°20.806'	—	Three pil-lared
50	South Kondazhi	Kondazhi	359x139x35	N10°42.526'	E076°24.306'	—	Three pil-lared
51	South Kondazhi	Kondazhi	352x133x33	N10°42.391'	E076°23.892'	—	Three pil-lared
52	Theendapaara	Thiruvil-wamala	285x125x34	N10°43.146'	E076°26.836'	—	Two pillared

53	Thekkethara	Pazahayannur	Cannot be taken	N10°41.110'	E076°25.515'	"1127 Ma-karam 15nu Cherukara Kizhakke veetil Lekshimiyam-ma vaka"	Broken
54	Thekkethara	Pazahayannur	Cannot be taken	N10°41.110'	E076°25.515'	—	Vazhiyam-balam
55	Thichur	Thichur	200x166	N10°42.563'	E076°10.810'	"Kapparathil Krishnamenon vaka"	Two pillared
56	Thozhupadam	Painkulam	375x122x36	N10°44.515'	E076°20.794'	—	Three pil-lared
57	Thozhupadam	Painkulam	160x117	N10°44.293'	E076°20.827'	—	Two pillared
58	Thozhupadam	Painkulam	360x97x36	N10°44.113'	E076°20.833'	"23.7.27 Thalappat-takaattil Valli vaka"	Three pil-lared
59	Thozhupadam	Painkulam	330x128x31	N10°44.113'	E076°20.834'	—	Three pil-lared
60	Uthralikkavu	Wadak-kancherry	310x115x50	N10°40.354'	E076°15.693'	"Rudhira-MahaaKaali Kaavil Poosali vaka"	Three pil-lared
61	Uthuvady	Killimanga-lam	195x95x27	N10°42.184'	E076°19.333'	—	Two pillared
62	Vadakkethara	Vadakkethara	180X110x30	N10°41.932'	E076°25.361'	—	Two pillared
63	Vadakkethara	Vadakkethara	315x126x35	N10°41.662'	E076°25.444'	—	Three pillared, Broken
64	Vadakkethara	Vadakkethara	360x135x35	N10°41.578'	E076°25.466'	—	Three pil-lared
65	Vadakkethara	Vadakkethara	180x65x37	N10°41.865'	E076°25.593'	—	Two pillared, Broken
66	Vadakkethara	Vadakkethara	370x110x36	N10°41.661'	E076°25.521'	—	Three pillared, Broken
67	Vaissery	Kunnamkulam	212x110x37	N10°38.945'	E076°02.432'	—	Two pillared
68	Varavoor	Varavoor	264x145x37	N10°43.620'	E076°12.934'	"1127 K V Parasupattar"	Two pillared
69	Vazhalipadam	Painkulam	364x154x35	N10°44.614'	E076°19.608'	—	Three pil-lared
70	Vazhalipadam	Painkulam	316x138x35	N10°44.608'	E076°19.445'	—	Three pil-lared
71	Vellangipaara	Venganellur	Cannot be taken	N10°42.854'	E076°20.339'	—	Two pillared
72	Vellappara	Elanad	135x100	N10°40.117'	E076°24.686'	—	Two pillared, Broken

73	Venganellur	Venganellur	321x100x35	N10°42.372'	E076°20.577'	–	Three pillared, Broken
74	Venganellur	Venganellur	360x146x36	N10°42.497'	E076°20.617'	”Parangodath Devaki Amma Narayanan Nair vaka Karkidakam 3 Thiyathi”	Three pillared
75	Venganellur	Venganellur	112x30	N10°42.419'	E076°20.348'	–	Broken
76	Venganellur	Venganellur	90(Height)	N10°42.079'	E076°20.628'	–	Two pillared, Broken
77	Venganellur	Venganellur	175x170x35	N10°42.185'	E076°20.407'	–	Two pillared
78	Venganellur	Venganellur	98x33	N10°42.334'	E076°21.265'	–	Two pillared, Broken

Present Condition

Though many of the *Chumaduthangi* in the study area are in good state of preservation; nowadays majority of the monuments are mainly misused by the political parties and locals to tie banners (Fig. 6) and to paint them for advertisement purposes (Fig. 9). Some people have used the broken stone slabs of *Chumaduthangi* for construction purposes as well. Some of the *Chumaduthangi* are in inaccessible condition due to vegetation growth and soil deposition. In many places *Chumaduthangi* are absent but the place name such as Poovathani (Poovathani derived its name from *Athani* or *Chumaduthangi* which had engravings of flower symbols on it) suggests the presence of them.

Conclusion

The *Chumaduthangi* exist as remnants of the past. The number of *Chumaduthangi* in Thalappilly taluk is higher than that of the adjacent taluks in Thrissur district. The geological and physiographical features of the particular area supported the construction of this stone structure and its functions. It is clear from historical records that Thalappilly area was part of

an active trade route at least till 1950s. Many places owe their place name from these stones and today it acts as a landmark. The actual number of the stones must be higher than the documented data because many of them might have completely collapsed or destroyed. Though many of the *Chumaduthangi* are in a stage of destruction some are well preserved. Being the valuable archaeological evidences to reconstruct the trade mechanism of medieval and late medieval Kerala, these monuments need to be protected from destruction due to natural and cultural activities.

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Figures

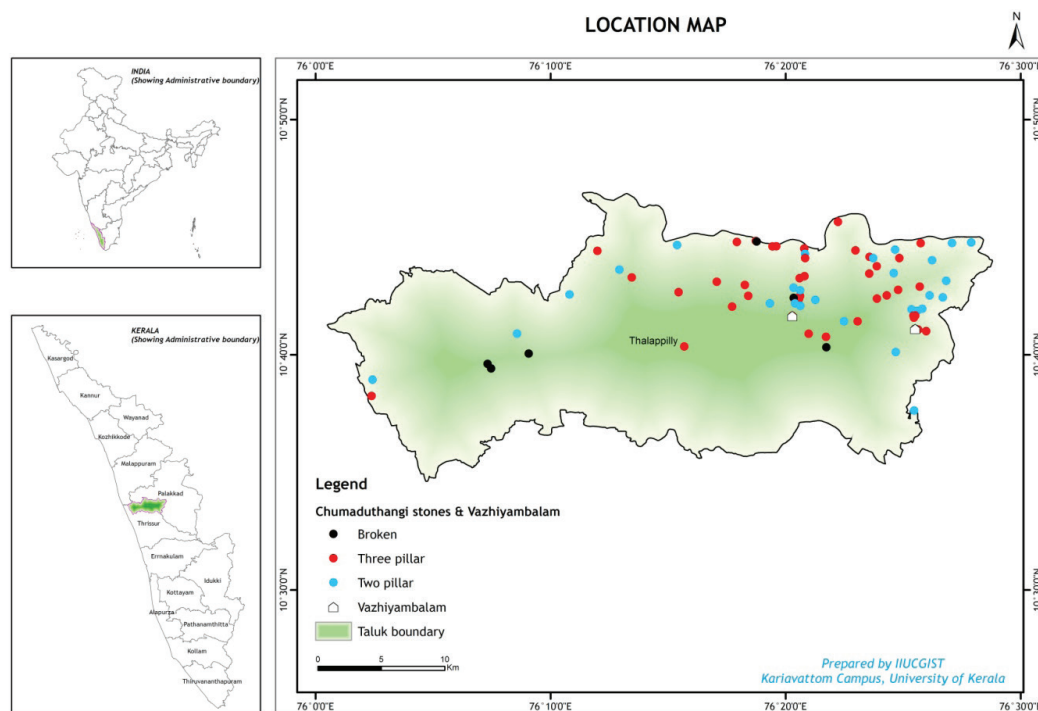


Figure 1. Location Map of Thalappilly Taluk

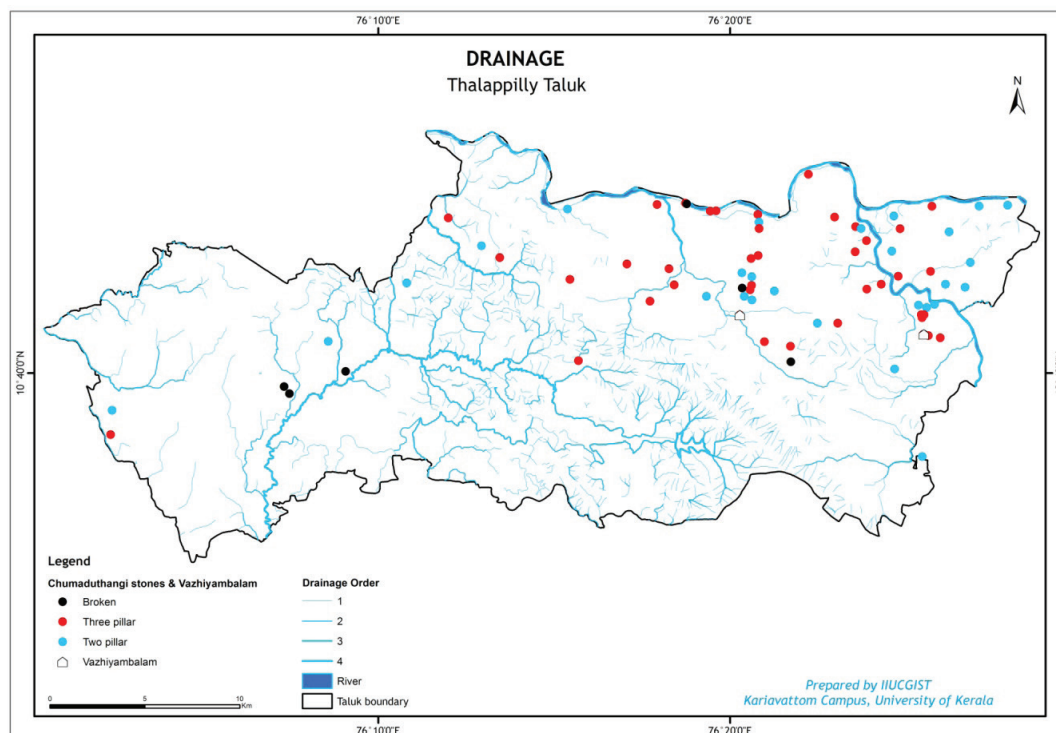


Figure 2. Drainage Map of Thalappilly Taluk



Figure 3. Two pillar Chumaduthangi, Venganellur



Figure 4. Three pillar Chumaduthangi, Pilakkode



Figure 5. Broken laterite Chumaduthangi, Eyyal Parappuram



Figure 6. Chumaduthangi having flower symbol and Inscription, Kootupaata



Figure 7. Chumaduthangi having flower symbol, Kaattilakkavu



Figure 8. Chumaduthangi having Palm symbol and semi curved portion, Thichur



Figure 9. *Chumaduthangi* having projection to climb, Pallimukku



Figure 10. *Chumaduthangi* having inscription, Choolipadam



Figure 11. *Vazhiyambalam* at Chelakkara



Figure 12. *Vazhiyambalam* at Pazhayannur

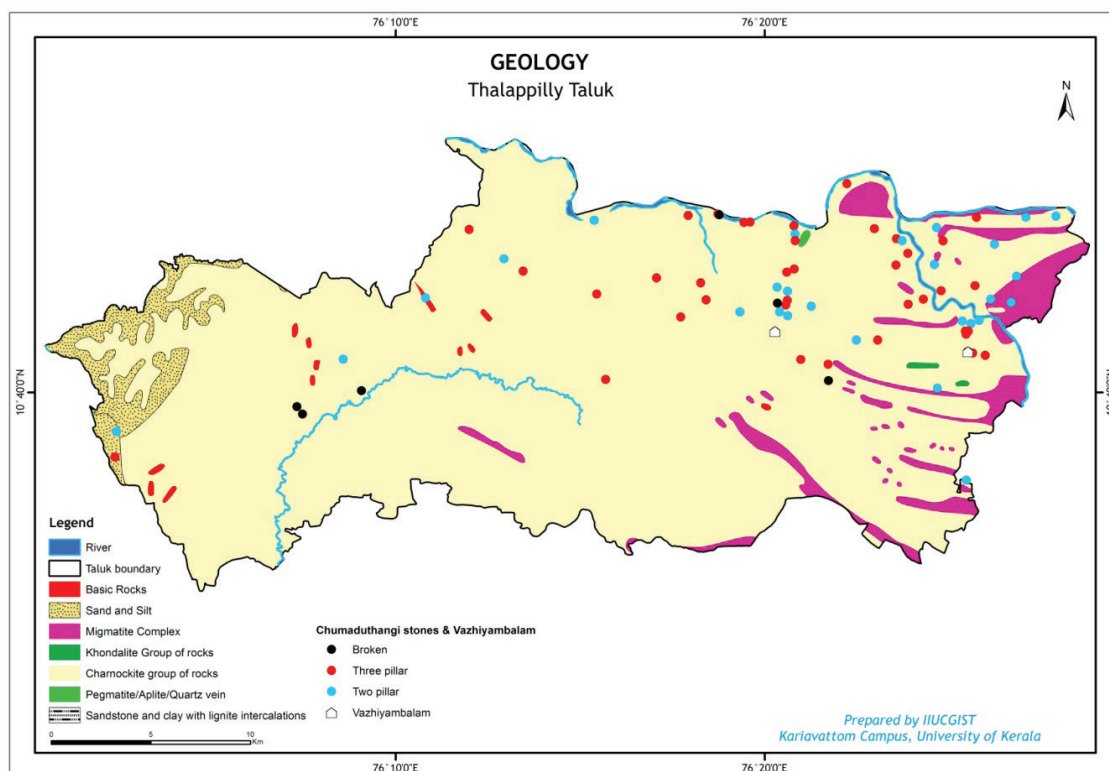


Figure 13. Geology map of Thalappilly Taluk

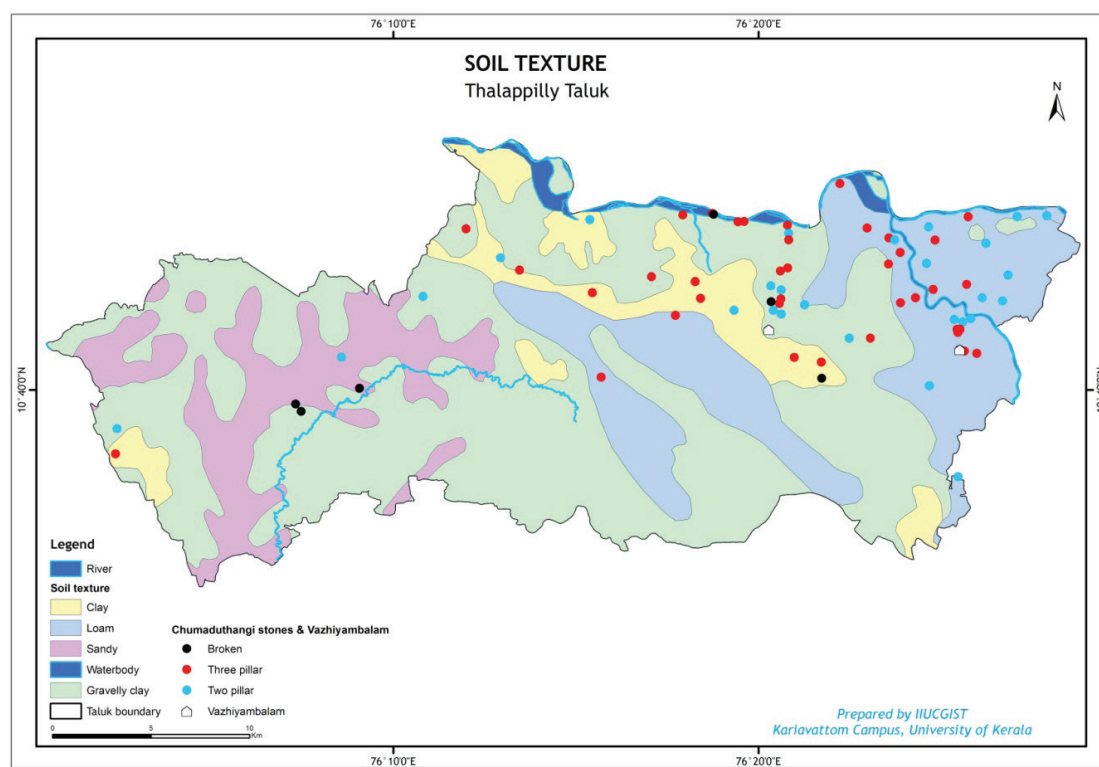


Figure 14. Soil map of Thalappilly Taluk

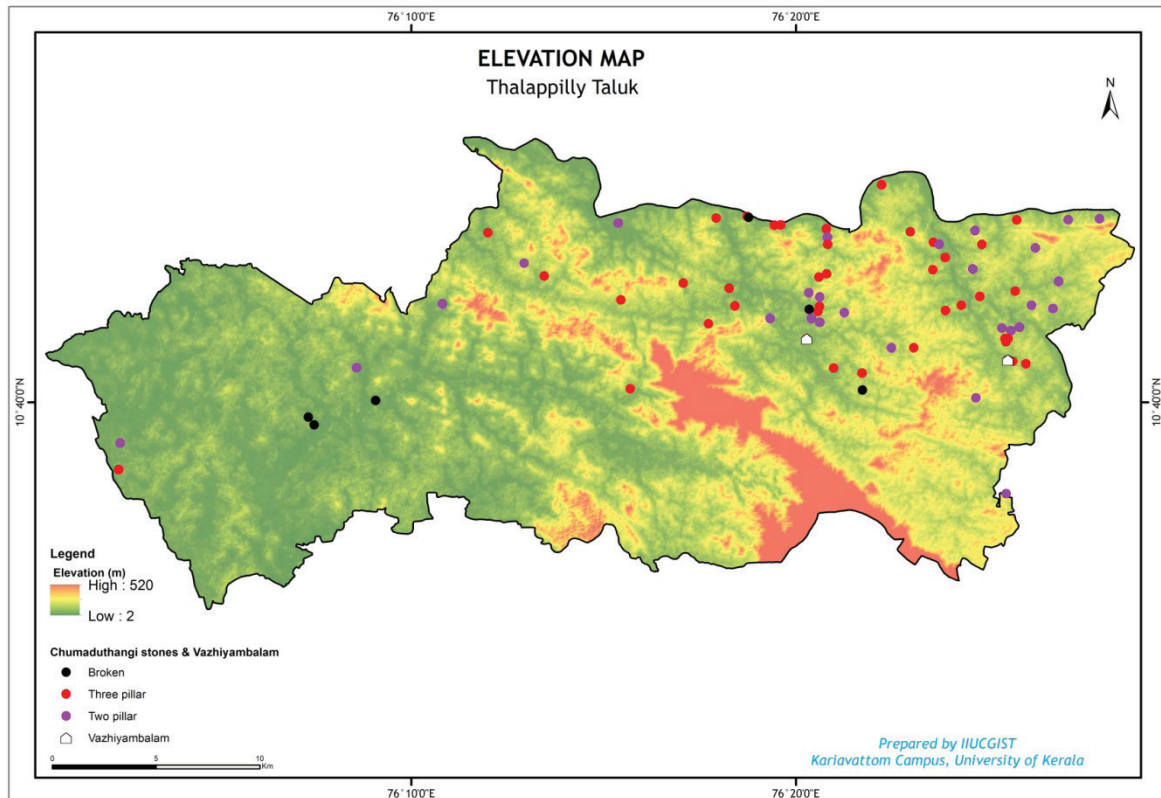


Figure 15. Elevation map of Thalappilly Taluk

