

HISTORICITY OF VIZHINJAM

Vizhinjam is a small village in Neyyattinkara Taluk, situated nearly fifteen Kilometers South of Trivandrum. The place is great historical and commercial importance. The region can claim a notable historical antiquity, as it was integral part of ancient Tamilakam. Being a natural port and centre of trade it played an important part in the history of South India. In the 8th century Vizhinjam reached the highest pinnacle of its glory and it became a premier educational and cultural centre. The rich and noble historical tradition had given her a cultural identity of her own. The fame of Vizhinjam is not a fading one even in the modern period as it is preserving her cultural marks. The cultural identity of Vizhinjam is perhaps due to its geographical peculiarity and natural blessings. It is gifted with a natural port, a rare advantage which differentiates Vizhinjam from the rest of the regions in Kerala.

The origin of the name Vizhinjam is a disputed matter. Scholars give different opinions with regard to the derivation of its name. Its origin is in obscurity. But Vizhinjam the capital of later Asia is a peculiar name. Perhaps the name is related to Venad because Vizhinjam was a great commercial centre in the Kingdom of Venad. Vizhinjam and Venad have close relation in names.

The present study, *Historicity of Vizhinjam* include three chapters other than introduction and conclusion.

The first chapter entitled the '*Antiquity of Vizhinjam*' deals with its great heritage in many fields. Historical background is the base for all developments and so this chapter is important to a great extent.

The second chapter *the Political heritage of Vizhinjam* deals the political background in Vizhinjam. The area was the royal seat of Ays and an important centre of activity of the Cheras, Cholas and the Pandyas.

The third chapter deals with the *Maritime history of Vizhinjam*. The maritime tradition of the region gave an independent and separate identity of the region. Traditional and other occupations played a dominant role in determining the economic development. Actually the economic status of the region is decided by the natural port Vizhinjam has a noble cultural antiquity. Its greatness can be seen in every nook and corner of the Village. The natural beauty of this area adds to its importance. It was the capital of the Ay kingdom which flourished in the ancient period. The coastal region has its own place in the map of Kerala. The place is hailed to be the birthplace of ‘Kovalam poets’. Ayyankali the social reformer of modern Kerala is the son of this historical place. Blessed with heritage and beauty the port has a unique place in the historical map of the world.

Vizhinjam is believed to be the capital of the later Ay Kings who reigned in South India in the 9th and 10th centuries AD. Being an important sea port and centre of trade in ancient time, it played a prominent part in the political history of ancient Kerala. The tremendous progress of Vizhinjam as a commercial place attracted the attention of the Pandyas and the Cholas. During the 11th century it was considered to be one of the major scenes of the battle between the Chera and Chola Kings. The Ays were the earliest ruling tribes in South Kerala before the rise of Venad as a political power. They were semi independent under the Cheras and Pandyas and at times asserted their independence³. All evidences point to the fact that the areas lying south of Thiruvalla were under the Suzerainty of the Ays in the Sangan Age. Attur Krishna Pisharadi in his introduction to *Lilathikam*, states that the *Ayar* family who were ruling from Aykudi had been defeated by the pandyas in the 8th century. It is believed that they had migrated to Vizhinjam.

There was an arsenal in Vizhinjam at the time. The officer in charge of the arsenal is mentioned as Srivallabha Perumpanaikan. The political significance of the land is evident from the fact that it had become the main target of attack by

outsiders entering Kerala. Old inscriptions refer the place as 'Kula Vizhinjam' or 'Kulapuri' which means 'Chief City'.

Elaborate arrangements were made by the Ay rulers like Karunantadakkan and Varaguna to effect an efficient administration in the Kulapuri. Decentralization of power was an important step taken by them. The region was divided into several administrative compartments entrusted under the supervision of brilliant administrative officers. They established salais or educational institutions under the control of temples. The capital city Vizhinjam was splendedored with forts, places, beautiful buildings, attractive temples, elaborate roads, trading centres etc. The prevalence of the natural sea port enhanced its pride and prestige. The place was a notable abode of brilliant intellectuals.

Maritime traditions and interactions have contributed immensely to the South Indian history, culture and heritage. A large number of textual evidence is available for the maritime history of Kerala, but archaeological evidence is comparatively rare. This paper is an attempt to study about the maritime tradition of Kerala with special reference to the Port of Vizhinjam on the basis of recent archaeological excavations which began in 2006, were conducted by the team led by Dr.Ajit Kumar, Head of the Department of Archaeology, University of Kerala. The beginning of the maritime interactions of Kerala is a matter of conjecture in the absence of concrete, substantial, archaeological and textual evidences. The maritime interactions of Kerala are more clearly visible archaeologically and textually from the second and first centuries before the beginning of Christian Era.

Vizhinjam's role in the economic history of Kerala is notable and significant. This region of natural beauty is as famous for its prosperity as it is gifted with natural blessings. The primary factor behind the economic prosperity of the land is the expansion of in land and foreign trade. Being a natural sea port suitable for commercial it had attracted foreign travelers and traders from time immemorial. Arab, Chinese and Europeans reached its share in the course of their voyages.

They used Vizhinjam port and coastal area as their resting place and Cargo centre.

Vizhinjam was a prosperous trading centre even during the Sangam period. The author of “the Periplus of Erythrian Sea” had mentioned about a notable trading centre ‘Balita’ which was a harbour and a village. Scholars have identified Balita with Vizhinjam.

Thus the study helps to understand the great cultural heritage of Vizhinjam, its geographical importance and the economic status of the port of Vizhinjam which also decide the economy of the state of Kerala.

Methodology

Historical, analytical and descriptive methods used for the study. The archaeological remains like the religious monuments played a vital role for the study.

Sources for the study

Field works are the major source of the study. The direct visit to the region help me to understand about the living monuments in Vizhinjam. The State archives in Thiruvananthapuram and the Regional archives in Ernakulam supplied rich sources for the study. The records of the religious institutions like temples, mosques and churches in Vizhinjam also supported my study of the region. Personal interviews with natives and historians like Dr. T.P.S.Nair, Dr. M.G.S.Narayanan, Dr. N.P.Unni etc. supplied valuable informations for the study. These are the primary sources for the study. The Travancore archaeological series gave a detailed description of the political background of the region.

The secondary sources like books, journals, periodicals and magazines are collected from various libraries like Thiruvananthapuram University Library, Center for Development Studies Thiruvananthapuram, Kariavattom Campus Library Thiruvananthapuram, K.C.H.R. Thiruvananthapuram, Thrissur Sahithya Accadami Library, Mala Carmel College Library, Calicut University Library etc.