
Vizhinjam Through the Ages: Situating the Development of Vizhinjam Port

Alphonsa Joseph¹ and Bushra Beegom R. K.¹

¹. Department of Sociology, University of Kerala, Kariavattom Campus, Thiruvananthapuram – 695 581, Kerala, India (Email: achurose2012@gmail.com, bushrabeegom@keralauniversity.ac.in)

Received: 12 July 2019; Revised: 23 August 2019; Accepted: 01 October 2019

Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology 7 (2019): 531-545

Abstract: Vizhinjam, a coastal zone of Thiruvananthapuram District of Kerala, has ancient historical tracings since 8th Century AD. The development of Vizhinjam is peculiar in the history of Kerala itself due to its relevance of the existence of a Fort and a Port in the locality of Vizhinjam. Archaeological and historical evidences clearly depicts the ancient remnants of the Fort and clear evidences of port –a fine harbour, which was the main trade centre for the Ay, Pandya, Chera and Chola dynasties. From the historical inscriptions and writings of scholars, it is clear that Vizhinjam was undergoing through several historical changes under several rulers. The paper tries to depict the early history of the Fort and Port city of Vizhinjam and the later development of Vizhinjam as a fishing harbour and an international port, which is renowned nowadays.

Keywords: Vizhinjam Fort, Ays, Cholas, Inscriptions, Kanthalur Salai, Archaeological Excavations, International Seaport

Introduction

The coastal village of Vizhinjam in Thiruvananthapuram has a legendary history with its peculiar standing in the ancient history catering recent developments. With the existence of a Fort and Port from the ancient times, the relevance of Vizhinjam has been eulogized by the early historians and studies has unearthed its archaeological and historical prominence. The excavations and academic exercises conducted at Vizhinjam has revealed its strategic and oceanic position in framing the polity of an era on being its prominence as a state capital and centre of maritime trade. Vizhinjam's natural setting with deep sea harbour, suitable for a port, has attracted the colonialist forces too. Its appositeness as a port inspired the Travancore rulers and subsequent governments for constructing a port at Vizhinjam. The present paper thus ponders into the aspect of development of Vizhinjam from the antiquity to the present focusing upon its recent development as an International Deepwater Multi-purpose Seaport. The development of Vizhinjam from a busy coastal zone with maritime trade, to a fishing harbour and recently as an International Seaport pave way in tracing a

trajectory of historical underpinnings of relevance. The present paper sketches out the ancient history, development and changes ensued at Vizhinjam. Even though Vizhinjam develops as a Port city, its underneath partakes a history of displacement. Vizhinjam is aspiring to get developed as a major development zone in the history of Kerala like the Cochin port, in fact Vizhinjam's aspirations are the aspirations of an emerging Kerala itself. To discern the history behind such a massive development of an area that has carved a niche of its own in the history of ancient and modern Kerala is worth deliberating.

Description of Vizhinjam by Early Travellers

The early historians and travellers has mentioned about Vizhinjam in their travelogues. *Periplus Maris Erythrea* (1st century CE), a Greek traveller was the earliest to mention about Vizhinjam "as a village with natural deep sea and it is situated in North of Kanyakumari, earlier known as Comari" (Kumar et.al 2013: 196). It was denoted as Balita, which had a harbour facilitating maritime trade (Schoff, 1911:235; Pillai 1984:177; Kumar et.al., 2013:196). The *Peutingar Tables* also mentioned about Vizhinjam being a coastal town near Comari and assumed as Blinca (Kumar 2011:43). This clearly evidences that, Vizhinjam was a flourishing coastal town with a harbour, which conducted maritime trade between countries since antiquity.

Epigraphic Evidences on Conquests

Vizhinjam underwent several conquests from several dynasties like Pandya, Chera and Chola. The first of it was from the Pandyans. Vizhinjam was apparently a part of the Pandya territory during the early historic as well as medieval periods for a considerable period. Nanjanad (Presently Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu) in the southern portion of the State which was under the Ay kings and Tinnevely district which was included in the Pandya kingdom had commercial and political relations through the Aramboly pass. Adjacent to it, Kottar was a great centre of trade in the south famous from the time of Ptolemy in the 2nd century A.D. But Nanjanad had suffered aggressions from the Pandyan kings for several years until tenth century A.D, when it was seized by the Cholas (Pillai, 1996:60).

Nedumchadayan, the Pandyan king, attacked Venad and captured the king of Venad and it is described that "He unsheathed his victorious weapon in order to destroy Viliinjam which has the three waters of the sea for its ditch, whose strong and high walls which rub against the inner part of the receding sky rise so high that the sun has to retire in his course". But Sastri observes that "Venad does not seem to have accepted the conquest as final". The Trivandrum Museum Stone Inscription (277 of 1895) says that, "the king was still fighting in the neighbourhood of Viliinjam more than ten years after the first invasion" (Sastri: 64; Pillai,1996:62). Nilakanta Sastri agrees with Gopinatha Rao, that Nedumchadayan invaded Venad and destroyed Viliinjam, the stronghold of the Cheras (Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol.I:158, Pillai, 1966:62). But this has again negated with the help of Trivandrum Museum plate which states that 'the Chera army after committing havoc near Viliinjam advanced to Karaikotta and

there Nedumchadayan has some loss to his force. Hence the inference from this incident is that the 'Pandyan was defeated near Viliñjam and pursued by Venad army which inflicted another defeat upon the enemy at Karaikkotta'. (p.63). However, they continuously strengthened their fortifications and the victories were claimed by his successor Sri Maran Sri Vallabha (815-862 A.D.). Nevertheless, the defeated local rulers are nowhere mentioned.

The Tamil epigraph of medieval period refers Vizhinjam as the capital of Malainadu and was called as Vilinda, Viliñam or Vilunum. Vizhinjam was renamed Rajendrasolapattanam and Kolutongasolapattanam on conquest of it by the Cholas as identified in the inscriptions (Rao, 1920:49,197-98).

An inscription at the Trivikramangalam Maha Vishnu Temple in Thamalam at Thiruvānāthapuram gives an exceptional record of the affluent trade and merchants at Vizhinjam. Accordingly it mentions that, "the mandapa was erected by Puttan-Vikkiraman alias Virasetti and Vikramankan-Dhiran alias Tigaimanikka-Setti, both of them apparently influential merchants of Viliñjam" (Ayyar, 1993:59-60), denoting that the merchants were prosperous enough to establish a temple on their own. Merchants and merchant guilds giving patronage to temples were common in those times. Another record of the same temple at Trivikramangalam mentions that "the bali-pitha to the piety of a certain Sattan-Kandan whose *alias* of Parakesari-Pallavaraiyan, significantly noted that it is an old name and that the temple must consequently have been founded about the period of Chola domination at Viliñjam and in the southern portion of the present Travancore State" (Ayyar, 1993:59-60).

Conquests

Rajaraja I, who ascended the throne in A.D.985 and did much to extend the Chola territory, was the son of Parantaka II alias Sundara-Chola (v.65), that he defeated the Western Chalukya king Satyasraya (v.67) and slew many enemy kings (v.66). In the Tiruvalangadu grant states that, his proper name was Arunmolivarman (v.70), and when he became king, he directed his attention to the conquest of the quarters commencing with the south (v.76), that he seized king Amarabhujanga (v.78), while his general captured *Vilindam*¹ (i.e. Viliñam) –which had the sea for its moat (v.79), and conquered the country created by Parasurama (v.83) (Rao, 1992:116). Rajaraja is referred to by the simple epithet 'Kandalursalai kalam-arutta-Rajakesarivarman'.

From the Sennur inscriptions in North Arcot district describes about Rajaraja I (Madras Epigraphical Report, 1912:66) and his conquests in the southern part of Travancore State like Viliñjam and Kanthalur. Of these, Viliñjam appears to have been under Chola domination and was renamed as Rajendra Chalapattanam. (Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol.VI:149). The conquest and the surrender of the then Venad kings are often contested. T.K Velu Pillai opines, "The conquest of Viliñjam does not, however, mean that the king of Venad was defeated; for the place was then in the possession of the Pandyas who obtained it from the Ay kings" (Pillai, 1996: 64).

The Manimangalam Inscription of 1046 A.D. of Rajadhiraja Chola I, refers about the King of Venad, which was an earliest reference (The Historical inscriptions of Southern India:71). Another recital in the Manimangalam inscription says that 'Rajadhiraja is said to have killed the king of Venad (Travancore), put to fight the Chera (Kerala) king and destroyed his ships at Kanthalur salai (Pillai, 1966:67). The fragmentary inscription of Chola at Trivandrum, containing a portion of the historical introduction of the Chola King Rajendra Chola I (A.D. 1013-45), is found engraved on a slab of stone in the first *prakara* of the Mahadeva temple at Chalai, a suburb of Trivandrum; but as the slab is a detached piece which may have belonged to some other temple and may have found its way here" (Ayyar, 1993:148). Based on this fragment, we could not reach a conclusion about the Chola fragment at Trivandrum. But it clearly denoted the existence of Chola rule at the Southern areas. This inscription clearly mentions about Vizhinjam and the functioning of a port there – "The port of Viliinjam seven miles from Trivandrum was of course renamed Rajendrasolappattinam in honour of this Chola monarch, as is known from two incomplete inscriptions belonging to Tiruppatisaram, one of which has been edited in the Travancore Archaeological Series (T.A.S., Vol. III: 298) and the other is on the west base of the Jatayupuram Siva Temple near Tiruppatippatisaram. The Chalai-Mahadeva Temple was a *kilidu-devasvam* of the Kandalur temple (Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol. II: 5) and it is possible that the present fragment may have belonged to some temple at Kandalur itself, or at Viliinjam" (Ayyar, 1993:149). This inscription legitimates that Vizhinjam was named as Viliinjam and had a port, which was renamed as Rajendrasolappattinam under the Chola Empire.

The Kanthalur Salai Controversy

The theory pertaining to conquest of Kanthalur Salai is contradictory and still elicits academic debates. In the *Travancore State Manual*, T.K. Veluppillai noted that, Kanthalur Salai existed in Trivandrum, which was the capital of the State, had a temple named Kanthalursala Mahadevar. The inscription depicted the name as 'Kanthalursala Kalamarutharuli'. Kanthalur Salai is often mentioned in the Chola inscriptions. The very inscription denotes that, Rajaraja Chola destroyed the ships in the roadstead of Kanthalur. But some others opined that the Chola king has made some regulation of feeding in a charitable institution. (Pillai, 1996: 60) *Kanthalur salai kalam arutharuli* (Travancore Archaeological Series Vol.I:238) was used controversially to refer about the presence of Chola dynasty over Travancore. The controversy regarding the meaning of 'Kalamaruthu' is also stated differently. There are two opinions regarding the meaning –one is 'the destruction of a fleet' and other is 'regulation of feeding' (Pillai, 1966:69). From this, it is revealed that there is 'an imaginary naval success by mentioning that the king was pleased to destroy the ships at the roadstead of Kanthalur' (Pillai, 1966:69). Thus, Kanthalur Salai kalam aruthu does not mean the destruction of a fleet at Trivandrum/Kanthalur.

'Kalam arukkal can hardly be taken as even a military success. The very fact that Rajaraja, Rajendra and Rajadithya take credit for the act shows that the claim cannot be

one of conquest; for it is not suggested that Kalamarukkal was a recurring ceremony to be performed by every monarch who sat on the Chola throne. In this connection, it may be pointed out that a Pandya king, Paranthaka, also speaks of *Kanthalur Salai Kalamarukkal* in one of his inscriptions' (Pillai, 1966:70). In the recent writings, it is noted that *kalam arutharuli* does not mean about the destruction of the ships. Mr. S. Desikavinayakam Pillai, a Tamil scholar gives the meaning that 'the king was pleased to make an endowment and fix the number of *kalams* (dinner plates) and fix the number of Brahman students to be fed in the institution at Kanthalur'. That scholar cites other instances of the expression *Kalamarutha eg.karakand svaiathu kalam aruthayandu, Thalakkulathu kalam aruthayandu*. He has also explained the locality with the help of a map and proved that both these places were inland villages in the time of Rajaraja I and that Katiyapattanam and Muttam were the sea-ports. The first two places are between two and three miles away from the coast. From this explanation, it is revealed that, Rajaraja and his successors desired to place religious instruction at Kanthalur Salai (Pillai, 1966:70).

Finding the exact details of Kanthalur Salai, the place as well as its name is problematic due to several interpretations. As delineated above, some historians suggest that Kanthalur salai is identical with the Valiya Chala Mahadevar Kovil at Trivandrum. (Travancore Archaeological Series Vol.II:6). But the Valiya Chala Temple is situated at a distance of four miles from the sea. The place is not currently known as Kanthalur. On the other hand, Ananthasayanam and Syananduram are famous names. Trivandrum was a well-known place in the tenth century A.D. and long before it; and therefore, one would naturally expect to find any of these names, and not Kanthalur (Pillai, 1996:68). Few others suggest that it was near Viliyam and there were earlier belonged to Madura Nayaks, had a church and presbytery by the Roman Catholics. (Aiyar: 141).

The deity in the Valiya Chala temple is known as Kanthalur Sala Mahadevar because twenty miles south of Trivandrum, there is a place called Kanthalur and it has an old temple. This locality was within the territories of the Ay kings which extended to Viliyam, which is only eight miles to the south of Trivandrum, the present capital of Travancore. During the days of Karunandadakkan (865 A.D.), the Ay ruler, Kanthalur salai was an important centre of religious study and educational activity. The arrangements made by the Ay king for religious instruction in Parthivasekharapuram were on the model of those at Kanthalur salai. On the extinction of the Ay dynasty the place became unimportant and the temple was neglected (Pillai, 1996:69). Due to this, the inhabitants were moved to Trivandrum and worshipped the idol of Kanthalur Salai at Valiya Chala temple. But it was not identified that, Kanthalur salai is the current Trivandrum.

Ay Fortification at Vizhinjam

The north of Kanyakumari (rightly said north-west) part was known as Nanjinad in later periods. But this name was not mentioned in Sanga period. On the north of

Nanjinad, the Nanjil Valluvars and on the north of that Ay kings ruled. Upto 5th century Ayakkudi, near Kuttalam was the capital of Ay kings. After the Pandyas captured Ayikkudi, the Ay kings lived in Thiruvattar (Vattar), Vizhinjam (Vilinjham). Later the regions on the north of Vizhinjam to the places near Kollam were known as Venad (Pillai, 1961:15). In the epigraphic references, the Vilinjham fort has been mentioned in the Madras Museum Copper Plates of Pandya King Nedunjadaiyan or Jatilavarman, that Vilinjham was under the rule of Ay dynasty. There is also mention about Vilinjham Fort in Tiruvalangad Copper Plates of Rajendra Chola dated to the 6th year AD (1016-17). Lot of primary records like Sangham literature, early Tamil works like *Pandikkovai*, *Iraiyanar Ahapporul Urai* belonging to 9th-10th centuries and *Jayamkondar's Kallingattup-parani*, *Kulottunga-solan-pillai-tamil* and *Vikarama-solan-ula* also have reference about the fort and seaport at Vilinjham (Sadasivan, 2003:2, Kumar, 2006:74).

Koopaka Inscriptions on Vizhinjam

It is relevant to note that there is a historical importance in the relationship of Venad and Koopakam, which speaks on Vizhinjam (Sloka. 68) (Pillai, 1955:143). But there is no exact evidence about the location of Ay dynasty. Sri.Swaminatha Ayyar mentioned that Aykkudi near Chengotta was their location but some others argued that, Kottar and Pothiyil Mala was the base of their kingdom. (Travancore Archaeological Series I:188).

There were historical evidences in the inscriptions of Koopaka kings that Vizhinjam was the main location of Chera kingdom in the southern region (Pillai, 1995:145). From the inscription of Maran Chadayan of the eighth century A.D., that he was fighting with the Chera army near Vilinjham (Pillai, 1996:74). In the Kanyakumari inscription of the Pandya king Paranthaka Pandya during 12th century A.D., noted that he was in a wedlock with the daughter of Koopaka King. (Travancore Archaeological Series I.iii:6). Gopinatha Rao translated this inscription as *"who vanquished the Chera in battle, and received tribute from him; who wrote the garland of vagai (flowers); who was offered by the king of Kupakas his daughter (in Marriage); who took the ancient Vilinjham where he fought his first battle (Kannippor); who destroyed the ships at the port of Kandalur, who set up ten beautiful golden lamps of rare workmanship for the God at Ananthapuram"* (Pillai, 1995: 146) The conquests made by Paranthaka in the places of Vizhinjam, Kanthalur Salai and Ananthapuram were on the south of Venad. Hence, it is presumable that, Venad and Koopaka had relations or were the same.

Ancient Temples

During 8th century A.D., the area where Vilinjham is located was under the rule of Ay kings. The prominent monument found at Vizhinjam is a rock-cut cave, dated back to 8th century AD. (Figure 1). The cave temple has a central cell with a single sculpture of Dakshinamurthy and on other side there are unfinished sculptures of Siva and Parvathi. This monument is now protected under the Archaeological Survey of India from 1965 onwards (George, 2015:1-2).



Figure 1: Rock-cut Cave Temple, Vizhinjam

Yet another temple located 200 m south of Vizhinjam Rock cut cave and represented as small temples consisting of a cell having a super structure and stairs lead to it (Rajesh 2003, 2004 & 2010:307). The complex consists of two temples, both facing east which are dedicated to Bhagavati and Shiva. The Aykkudi Bhagavati Temple and Aykkudi Siva temple were dated back to 9th century CE (Kramrisch et.al 1999 and Rajesh et.al., 2010:308) and it is a surviving example of earliest Dravidian Temples of Kerala (Rajesh et.al., 2010:307). This temple complex is situated in the midst of a seashore slum area is in a dilapidated condition due to the encroachment of the local people and action of natural factors, as a result, facing threat of its existence (Rajesh et.al., 2010:307) (Figure 2). These temples well evidence the structural transformation from cave temples to structural temples in Kerala.

After the Ays and Venad rulers, Vizhinjam as a maritime port and political centre slipped into oblivion. We do not find any significant reference on its survival until the colonial period.

British Fort and Factory at Vizhinjam

The British fought the Dutch and Portuguese in the beginning for making their hold over India. Their earliest settlement in India was Surat on the West Coast. In 1611, they founded a factory at Musulipatam on the East Coast. In 1616 they entered into an agreement with the Zamorin. In 1622 India and Persian Gulf opened its way for English. In 1639, one of the Musulipatam factors, Francis Day, obtained a small strip of land at Madras from the Raja of Chandragiri, of the old Vijayanagar stock.



Figure 2: Aykkudi Bhagavati Temple, Vizhinjam

Through this, they had assured their foothold in the south and then the English looked about for sites for new settlements. In 819 M.E. (1644 A.D.) permission was obtained from the king of Travancore to build a factory at Viliinjam, eight miles south of Trivandrum. This was the earliest English settlement in this state (Pillai, 1996:195).

During the reign of Maharaja Karthika Tirunal Rama Varma, there were strong relations between Travancore and the English East India Company. In 1764 A.D. the King gave permission to English to erect a flagstaff at Viliinjam and in the very next year they were allowed to build a factory at Verapoly. The English had cast away their attitude of a mere trading company and were making forays from their factories to grasp political power (Pillai, 1996:374-375).

Archaeological Explorations and Excavations at Vizhinjam

The historically important locale of Vizhinjam was neglected by the historians and archaeologists for a long time. The excavations at Vizhinjam started from 1997 onwards

and recent explorations conducted by the Department of Archaeology, University of Kerala from 2011 to 2013 in three seasons brought forth new revelations. From these excavations, the monuments and sculptures were denoted the historical significance of fort and port city of Vizhinjam datable from 8th -19th century AD. (Abhayan et.al., 2014:255). Also, Vizhinjam has a historical backdrop of pearl fisheries from ancient times (Francis 2014, Abhayan et.al,2014:255).

The fort area is identified as Kottappuram and Marunukotta at Viliinjam-where 'kotta' in local language means-Fort. Marunukotta was located at Mathilpuram- Cherumanal area and etymologically it also means 'walled area'. This was close to the seashore and called as Marunukotta, which the people believed that the area was rich in medicinal plants. These two locations of fort at Viliinjam have been clearly allied with the inscriptions about Ay fort in the early literatures (Kumar, 2006:75).

The existence of a 'Kappalchal', through which the water enters and go back to sea, indicate that there was a way for the ships to enter into the channel and also there existed a harbour. The sea channel near the fort and the fishing harbour in the southern side of the fort (Kumar, 2006:75) clearly corroborate with verse 79 of the Tiruvalangad inscription of Rajaraja I, whose proper name was Arunmolivarman -that he has been starting his conquests from the south (v.76) that he seized king Amarabhujanga-a pandya king (v.78) and his general captured 'Vilindam (Viliinam) which had the sea for its moat' (v.79). The existence of a port at Viliinjam also stated in Madras Museum plates of Jatilavarman, that the Pandya sovereign caused the excellent port of Viliinam to be destroyed (Historical sketches p.133). Napier Museum stone epigraphs also mentioned about it (TAS Vol.I:158). From this it is clear that there was a port at Viliinjam and which has been attacked by the Pandyas. The fort at Viliinjam has been dated back to 8th century A.D. in which the Pandya king Jatilavarman or Nedunjadaian reigned during the late 8th century AD. (Sastri 1920:421, Kumar,2006:77). The Ay rulers laid the foundation for fort at Viliinjam. This is the only remnants of a fort which is pre-dated the colonial period in Kerala and this has been considered as the most important discovery of an ancient fort fragments in Viliinjam, (Kumar, 2006:77) excavated by the Department of Archaeology, University of Kerala.

The excavations have yielded a rich cache of artefacts throwing fresh light on the early history of Vizhinjam. The earliest artefact reported from Vizhinjam seems to be a gold coin of Ptolemy II or Philadelphos who ruled Egypt (285-246 BCE).The early pottery from Vizhinjam is a variety of embossed / paddled red ware dated to early historic period. This pottery is generally distributed in the sites along the littoral regions and owes its dispersal to maritime trade. The Rouletted ware and Torpedo jar shards (belonging to 4th-7th centuries and of West Asian origin) establish the early history and antiquity of the same as a port town. The Egg shell ware identified from there owes its origin to Iraq. Large caches of Turquoise glazed pottery discovered have been of long duration and usage. Vizhinjam yielded rich pottery remnants from East Asia. Chinese wares includes plain white variety, blue on white, celadon and a pale yellow cracked

ware with blue paintings. The pale green celadon shards are datable between 11th and 12th CE. Most of the Chinese porcelain seems to have their origin from the kilns of Longquan and Jingdezhen in South China. Similarly, the Burmese and East Asian (Thai and Vietnamese) porcelain have been identified from Vizhinjam possibly between 14th and 16th centuries CE. The shards of Dutch and British porcelain or table ware indicate that Vizhinjam maintained contacts with European countries as late as 18th -19th centuries. The prosperity of the region is well attested by the variety of local and foreign pottery types and other trade items recovered at the site. The extensive external trade had facilitated internal trade (Kumar et.al. 2013:195-200). The most striking of the discovery throwing light on the religious history of the region is a Shiva Linga. It was used in construction of a retention wall of a house in the Mathilppuram area. Its features date it to 8th-9th century CE. The existence of the Linga directs to a possibility of yet another Shiva temple in Vizhinjam, other than the ones existing already. The Shivate influence in the coastal belt is discernable owing to the proximity of these temples near to the harbour (Kumar et.al. 2013:195-200).

Three cultural periods were identified at the site ranging from early historic (1st century AD) to late medieval and modern periods. Interesting spectrums of animals were involved in the day today society at Vizhinjam during the various cultural periods. The faunal assemblage excavated indicated the presence of mammals like cattle/buffalo, goat/sheep, hare, dog, cat, bandicota rat, birds, turtle and mollusks. This also signifies the subsistence pattern of the society. The food economy of at Vizhinjam was mostly centred on marine resources like fish, molluscan shells and cuttle fish. Besides, substantial support was rendered by mammalian domestic animals such as cattle/buffalo, goat/sheep and pig. (Abhayan et al. 2014: 253-271).

The pertinent archaeological excavations at Vizhinjam testifies that it was one of the earliest historical townships and trade mart along the south coast of Kerala, legitimizing the early travelogues, which catered to and entrenched in the international maritime trade flourishing in Indian ocean. The Egyptian coin and variety potteries depict its exceptional standing international maritime relations. The Ays and the Chola reign furthered Vizhinjam's trade concerns. In spite of a transitory lull, trade and commerce flourished in Colonial period. The first half of the 20th century saw building of an interest of the state upon the potential of Vizhinjam and proposals were undertaken to extract benefits out of it and convert it to a fishing harbour. This initiative gave a new birth to Vizhinjam and prodding the future governments to invest upon the same.

Proposal for Fishing Harbour

In the last century, Maharaja Sree Chithira Tirunal Balaramavarma took initiatives for the development of a port at Vizhinjam with the supervision of Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer, the then Diwan of Travancore. An amount of Rs.375 Lakhs was sanctioned for the preparation of a project for port development. But due to the consolidation of Thiruvithamkoore-Kochin states, the above project was dropped. In 1955-57, an expert

committee prepared a report for supporting the port at Vizhinjam and after that it changed as a fishing harbour (Menon, 2003: 165; CEIA,2013).

Development in the Post- Independence Era

After about a decade of independence, the Kerala government flagged off the development of Vizhinjam, which saw its beginning as a fishing harbour to an international port of what it is today. In 18th February 1960, The Director of Fisheries sent a letter to Mr. C.R. Bjuke, Consulting Engineer from Sweden to prepare plans and specifications for the construction of Vizhinjam harbour. Based on this, he prepared a plan for the construction of harbour in three stages. His plan was approved by the Government of Kerala and issued orders accordingly.

In July 19th, 1962, the works committee meeting of the Govt. of Kerala, under the leadership of Sri. Pattom A. Thanu Pillai, Chief Minister issued orders for the construction of the 1st stage of the fishing harbour at Vizhinjam. It was included in the third Five Year Plan and with a total cost not exceeding Rs.122 Lakhs. Thus, the construction of the fishing harbour started during 1962. A pillar of 12 feet height with text at the bottom- “Vizhinjam Harbour Project, inaugurated by Shri S.K. Pattil, Minister for Food and Agriculture, Government of India, on 12th September 1962” was installed in Vizhinjam on the occasion of the foundation stone laid down for the construction works.

In 28th June 1963, Sri. R. Sankar, the then Chief Minister of Kerala, issued a revised administrative sanction for the first stage of the construction of Vizhinjam fishing harbour with a revised plan provision of Rs. 129 Lakhs by using Tetrapods for breakwaters. For the construction of the port, the land acquisition and rehabilitation of the local fishermen people were also needed, and a special land acquisition officer has been appointed in 2nd June, 1971 for the above purpose. There were protests from the local people on the acquisition of their land for the project. But the government has acquired land and rehabilitate the displaced people with a group of staff were appointed for the land acquisition for Vizhinjam port including a special Deputy Tahsildar in 20th October 1971 through a government order. In 20th July 1977, during the Chief Ministership of Sri. A.K. Antony, the works of the fishing harbour project has been transferred to the Harbour Engineering Wing of the Port Department to fasten the works with full expertise.

The second and third phase has sanctioned during 1977 and 1983. Land acquisition was problematic. Giving their land for the fishing harbour, lead to the problem of evictees. Thus, a special order was issued in 27th September 1979 for the rehabilitation of the evictees under urgency clause. During the second phase also, 40 Ha land were acquired and lots of fishermen were displaced from their land. Again in 1990s, there were serious discussions on the construction of an international seaport. But the natives and tourist lobby in Vizhinjam were apprehensive about this effort. Due to their protests, the notification for the project was terminated (Joseph, 2019) (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Old Fishing Harbour



Figure 4: New International Seaport

The fishing harbour project has been bearing a long history to reach the currently constructing International Deep-water Multipurpose Sea Port jointly constructed by the Government of Kerala and the sole bidder of the Private partner, Adani with PPP model. On 5th December 2015, the then Chief Minister Oommen Chandy laid the

foundation stone for the Vizhinjam International Deep-water Multi-Purpose Sea Port, with M/S Adani Ports Private Limited as the sole concessionaire in a Public Private Partnership (PPP) Model. Being a natural port with 21m water depth, they claimed that there will be less dredging and maintenance cost for the port. But the matter regarding the land acquisition and displacement of inhabitants and livelihood problems erupted again (Joseph, 2019) (Figure 4).

In all development projects, the pertinent concern lies in the matter of land acquisition for the project site. Now with the increasing population, a coastal zone like Vizhinjam has a high density of population of fishermen community. In this context, the question of land acquisition is an adequate requirement for the construction and development of the port. The dream project of Vizhinjam seaport requires hectares of land from the local people and this land acquisition is leading to another relatable consequence of displacement of inhabitants from their homeland. Thus, as a mega project, it should cater to the plights of the native people on the background of the development of port at Vizhinjam. Development-induced displacement had a long history related to the big projects, as the same is happening in the case of Vizhinjam.

Conclusion

The present paper has elaborated the brief historical backdrop of Vizhinjam Port bearing vestiges of the past maritime trade relations. It is evidenced from the historical documents that Vizhinjam was a politically and geographically strategic area with its proximity to trade routes which in turn catered maritime trade. As an ancient Fort and Port city, Vizhinjam has claimed its glorious traditions through the ages till now with the upcoming International Seaport. It is highlighted as the dream project for the State and Central Government, which is expected to bring huge development in the local area ie. Vizhinjam in particular, the State of Kerala as well as India in general. Nonetheless, in all development projects, on the one side it is assumed to bring development and on the other side, it will be leading to miseries to the local people, especially when there is land acquisition and rehabilitation associated with it. The development projects, land acquisition and displacement of people has a historicity of its own, which is not closely examined here; but that will be a major concern in the construction of Vizhinjam Port, which has traditional underpinnings through the ages.

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