

“Potential Unearthing Tourism in Dhanushkodi A Study”

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Abstract

Tamil Nadu is naturally endowed with rich and diverse places of tourist attractions. Therefore it creates curiosity and interest in the minds of the native and foreign people. It gives mental pleasure for economic impetus in addition to reasons of restoration of health conditions coupled with spiritual pursuits. Ramanathapuram district in Tamil Nadu has many tourist places like Rameswaram, Kurusadai Island, Annai Indira Gandhi Bridge, Sea World Aquarium etc. Some of the well-known temples in the district which attract a large number of pilgrims as well as general tourists. It has the great architectural design such as Veyil Ugantha Vinayagar Alayam, Patham Priyalkoil, Saatchi Hanuman temple etc., There are also a famous tourist places of pilgrimage like Ramalinga Vilas Palace, Dhanushkodi, Ervadi Dargah, Kilakarai, Lighthouse, Oriyur Arulanandar Church, and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam memorial etc.

Keywords: Rama Ramayana sea island spiritual Sethu theertham

Introduction

From early historical times, Ramanathapuram district has been found popular in pilgrim centers. Rameswaram has been the sacred pilgrim centers for the Hindus from very ancient times. Pilgrims from all over India throng to the holy temple. According to Ramayana, Rama was on his return from Ceylon after having killed Ravana and recovered his wife Sita. He rested at this place and in view to free himself from the sin of having killed Ravana. He bathed in the sea near Dhanushkodi and worshipped Eswara. Tamil ruler's contributions to Rameswaram temple were manifold. They consist of grant of villages for the day to day administration of the temple and the upkeep of the temple offerings, construction of different parts of the temple at different periods and renovations. The district got varied and colorful ingredients in the form of land and sea, leading to economic, aesthetic, spiritual, and cultural attractions.

Dhanushkodi is an abandoned town at the southeastern tip of the Pamban Island of the state of Tamil Nadu in India. It is situated in the South-East of Pamban. It located is about 18 miles (29 km) west of Thalaimannar of Sri Lanka. The town was destroyed during 1964 by cyclone. It remains uninhabited in the aftermath ^[1]. Dhanushkodi is located on the tip of Pamban Island, which separated from the mainland of Palk Strait. It only shares the land border between India and Sri Lanka. It is one of the smallest town in the world at 45 meters (148ft) in length on a shoal in Palk Strait.

Traditionally speaking the Hindus always liked to visit two sacred places in India. They are Rameswaram in South India and the Mount Kailas in North India. Much is known about the Rameswaram Island and its famous temple. Dhanushkodi town in Rameswaram is not very much known outside. It is just a place for visiting and roaming around the devastated town. Dhanushkodi is twenty seven kilometers away from Rameswaram. Bordered by the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, this semi-ghost town is probably one of the most

spectacular stretches in Tamil Nadu. No valuable work has been done on Dhanushkodi so far ^[2].

The geography of the epic Ramayana would be in completed without Dhanushkodi, said to be shaped like Rama's bow itself, and the nearby ancient Shiva temple in Rameswaram where Lord Ram, on retrieving Seetha after vanquishing. The Lankan King Ravanna performed a purification ritual on the way back to his home in Ayodhya. Further by adding to Dhanushkodi as a 'sacred theertha' from 'Puranic time' it is a confluence of two seas-Rathnakaram and Mahodhikam, in modern days, it is known as the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Straits. So much so, Hinduism's folklore has it that a pilgrimage from 'Kashi' is never complete without a dip in Dhanushkodi, enchantingly encircled by sea on three sides ^[3].

Historical Events

According to Hokapur inscriptions Krishna III was the ruler of the Chalukyan dynasty and Visited Ramanathapuram during the 10th century AD. In memory of his *digvijaya*, he established the victory pillar at the end of Sethu (Dhanushkodi). And also, he built a small temple of Kanda Marthanda Eswara. This temple was situated on the premises of Rameswaram Temple ^[4].

One can see the sunrise and setting of the sun in Dhanushkodi. Most of the people take bath in the sea in Dhanushkodi during the *Aadi and Thai Amavasai* day and offer prayers. It is invoking at the blessings of their ancestors. In ancient times, it is believed that the Hindu Vaishnavites temple was situated at Dhanushkodi. The name of the temple was Sethu Madhava Perumal temple. This was not included in the list of 108 Vaishnavites temples. But, Vaishnavites visit the temple frequently. Later, this temple must have been submerged by the sea. The famous '*Sethu theertham*' was also washed away. So the people who visit Rameswaram take a bath at Agni tartan instead of Sethu theertham ^[5].

In 1480 A.D. Dhanushkodi, Rameswaram and Pamban and the surrounding area were cut off from the mainland by a violent storm [6]. During the period of the Nayaks of Madurai and Sethupathis of Ramanathapuram the Island was connected by the causeway and Ferry services [7]. Thereafter, it was connected with the mainland near *Mandapam* by a *Scherzer* bridge of Southern Railway [8].

During the rule of Kizhavan Sethupathi alias Raghunatha II made many charitable works and granted many villages not only Khizhavan Sethupathi but also his wife also, Kathali Nachiar donated the Melaseethai village to the Ramanathaswamy temple in 1693A.D [9]. Kathali Nachiar took a sacred bath in Dhanushkodi to celebrate the *Adi Amavasai Festival* in 1710 A.D. granted village called Kalatur to the Brahmins of Dhanushkodi.

During the reign of Kattaya Deva alia, Kumara Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi (1728A.D.-1735 A.D.), constructed counties at Thangachimadam, Rameswaram and Dhanushkodi. The Nandagobala Choultry was constructed and maintained by the Yadavas of Rameswaram to help the pilgrims [10]. Cattiram or country which was a center for feeding pilgrims and the poor, the Brahmins, also served as an orphanage, hospital and school [11].

In 1801, the Revenue Board of the British Government ordered the collectors of the districts to take care of the lands under the control of the chatters [12]. From Thanjavur to the north of Dhanushkodi in the South these were twenty two countries which were patronized by the Marathas. In Rameswaram, Rameswaram Chattiram and Dhanushkodi-Sethukarai chattiram, also served the pilgrim [3].

This coastal tip did have a flourishing maritime past the historians point out that during the British period a small port was developed in 1914 in Dhanushkodi. It was the point that anchored a rail-cum-sea route right from the erstwhile Presidency capital of old Madras to Talaimannar in Northern Sri Lanka. The train on that route was called 'Boat Mail'. The rail link From the port town and here a ferry across the shallow Palk Straits to Thalaimannar. It was part of the umbilical chord relationship between India and Sri Lanka. 'Irwin' and 'Goshan' were two small passenger ships that ferried people who alighted by train from Madras and other places at Dhanushkodi to Thalaimannar. Thus Dhanushkodi evolved into a tiny commercial hub, earning the sobriquet 'Kutti Singapore' in those days [14].

Railways

The introduction of railways into the Ramnad Zamindari was a milestone in the history of Zamindari. In 1902, a railway line from the Madurai branch line of meter gauge was extended upto Mandapam [15]. In 1908, a rail track from Rameswaram and Dhanushkodi was completed. In 1914 the line from Rarneswaram was extended upto Dhanushkodi which was maintained by Ido-Ceylon railway. A large number of passengers and cargo were transported between India and Ceylon with of this railway line.

In the year 1949, a train from Madras to Dhanushkodi named as Boat Mail was inaugurated via Madurai. It was otherwise called as Indo-Ceylon Boat Mail before the incident of 1964, and it was called as male [16]. The railway line of 10.64 miles connecting Rameswaram with Dhanushkodi jetty was opened on 10 December 1908. This line was subsequently extended by 0.07 miles to connect Dhanushkodi jely on December 1914 [17].

Seaport

During the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. trade was carried on from the Malabar Coast through the port of Dhanushkodi to the Coromendal coast [18]. In 1914, the value of goods carried through the port of Dhanushkodi was Rs.2, 27, 36, 424. [9]. The South Indian Company was started after 1914. The company maintained two streamers namely, T.S.S. Irwin and T.S.S. CHOSEN plying between Thalia Mannar (Srilanka) and Dhanushkodi (India) [20]. After the advent of the East India Company, the English exported firewood and tortoises. From Pamban and Dhanushkodi to Ceylon Cotton was sent through Dhanushkodi, to Ceylon port to all over India. After the introduction of the South Indian Railway, the cargo moved into Dhanushkodi port and trade with Ceylon it was carried through this port after 1914. Dhanushkodi was opened as a port on 1 March, 1914. It was a gateway to Srilanka.

Postal System

Robert Clive of the East India Company had introduced a postal system to operate in the company's territory in 1796. In 1815, a post office at remained was built at the cost of thirty six pagodas as there was not regular office. A taps writer was appointed to the post office at Ramnad from 1837 and the letters were conveyed by wire on a daily basis. At the end of the nineteenth century Ramnad Zamindari had thirty- one post offices. Dhanushkodi was one among them [21]. After 1963, postal service was introduced to the Island at Dhanushkodi.

Transport

The roads in Ramnad Zamindari were not developed. They were maintained only for military, religious and trade purposes. From fifteenth October to fifteenth January of each year, Ceylon mails crossed from Mannar to Dhanushkodi or Rameswaram and thence via this road to Pamban and Madurai [22]. The National Highways department was established in 1946. As a result, the road between Madurai and Dhanushkodi was included in the National Highways.

Hospitals

In 1856, one Hospital and dispensary were established in Ramnad by the Zamindar. As it was not known to all the people, the government had decided to give publicity in the official gazette. Convicts were employed for cleaning the towns. Eleven hospitals and six dispensaries were established at Ranianathapwam Zamindari. There was no development in the hospital sector.

As the plague had rapidly spread in Dhanushkodi, nurses were employed additionally in order to cope up with the situation. A dispensary at Dhanushkodi was also established in 1918. The Government appointed the private medical practitioners to give free treatment for patients in 1924. The government decided to expand the dispensary by sanctioning the construction of Coward in 1927.

Drought

There are many evidences to indicate that Dhanushkodi and Pamban were the centers of trade from early times. Traders from Middle Eastern countries settled in these areas for the purpose of trade [23]. During the sixth and seventh century AD., the traders carried the articles from the Malabar Coast through the port of Dhanushkodi to the Coromendal coast [24]. On the other hand due to fluctuating seasons, the rainfall was not sufficient and proper in Ramnad Zamindari. So the region was declared a drought-prone.

Migration

In 1877 most of the people from South Ramnad had migrated. Drought occurred frequently [25]. A large number of people migrated to foreign countries via Dhanushkodi to Ceylon and neighboring Tanjore area. Many people who migrated to Ceylon were suffered. In this situation the government took necessary action to regulate the emigration and safeguard. The government established an “*office of the protector of emigrants*” at Dhanushkodi in 1923.

1964 Cyclone

The area around Rameswaram is prone to high-intensity geomorphic activity. A scientific study conducted by the Geological Survey of India indicated that the southern part of Dhanushkodi facing the Gulf of Mannar sank by almost 5 meters (16 ft) in 1948 and 1949, due to vertical tectonic movement of land parallel to the coastline. As a result of this, a patch of land of about 0.5 kilometers (0.31 mi) in width, stretching 7 kilometers (4.3 mi) from north to south, submerged in the sea [26]. On 17 December 1964, a depression formed at 5°N 93°E in the South Andaman Sea. On 19 December, it intensified into a cyclonic storm. After 21 December 1964, it moved westwards, almost in a straight line, at the rate of 400 to 550 kilometers (250 to 340 mi) per day. On 22 December, it crossed Vavunia in Sri Lanka and made landfall at Dhanushkodi on the night of 22–23 December 1964. Estimated wind velocity was 280 kilometers per hour (170 mph) and tidal waves were 7 meters (23 ft) high.

Remains in Dhanushkodi

In Ramanathapuram district Dhanushkodi is known as small Colombo [27]. The southernmost tip of the Island, Dhanushkodi was hit by the 1964 Cyclone yet the Kothandarmaswamy temple and the stone wallex church remained intact and the deities, namely, Rama, Site, Lakshmana, Hanuman and Vibeeshana were undisturbed. But, the church does not contain the icons of Jesus Christ [28]. Christianity was introduced in the Rameswaram Island by St. Francis, Xavier, a noted Professor of Sorbonne University, Paris, France. He came to the Island in 1544 A.D. Fr. S.J. Buddle built a fine *Stone-Wallex Church* at Dhanushkodi and erected several other chapels and schools [29].

On the night of 23 December 1964, a Cyclonic storm and tidal waves from the northern shores of the Rameswaram Island lashed the tiny city. The Great Cyclone has been formed from the Bay of Bengal and crossed the Palk Strait. At the same time, the tidal cyclonic wave's raised up to twenty meters in height, hitting and entered into the Dhanushkodi town [30]. The fury, lasting for twenty five hours and devastated it. The Rameswaram road and Dhanushkodi, a narrow strip of land for a fifteen kilometer stretch were swept away [31].

Approximately 1,800 people died in the cyclonic storm on 22 December including 115 passengers on board Pamban-Dhanushkodi passenger train. The entire town was marooned and the Government of Madras declared Dhanushkodi as Ghost town, unfit for living. In December 2004, the sea around Dhanushkodi receded about 500 meters (1,600 ft) from the coastline, exposing the submerged part of the town for a while followed by massive tsunami waves that struck the coast.

Transport

A meter gauge railway line connected Mandapam on mainland India and Dhanushkodi. Boat mail expresses ran from Chennai Egmore to Dhanushkodi till 1964 when the

meter-gauge branch line from Pamban to Dhanushkodi was destroyed during the 1964 Dhanushkodi cyclone. In 2003, Southern Railway sent a project report to Ministry of Railways for re-laying a 16 kilometers (9.9 mi) railway line to Dhanushkodi from Rameswaram. The planning commission looked into the possibility of a new railway line between Dhanushkodi and Rameswaram in 2010. Until 2016, Dhanushkodi was reachable either on foot along the seashore or in jeeps. In 2016, a road was completed in the village of Mukundarayar Chathiram.

Dhanushkodi Road Dedicated to the Nation

The once flourishing Dhanushkodi, which remained cut off from Rameswaram Island for 53 years after it was ravaged by the 1964 cyclonic storm. It is set to regain its lost glory as Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared open the ‘Dhanushkodi Road’ on Thursday [32]. After inaugurating the memorial of former President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Mr. Modi dedicated the 9.5-km-long road, connecting Dhanushkodi to the mainland through the National Highways (NH-49) to the Nation through video conferencing while addressing a public meeting at Mandapam. Governor Ch. Vidyasagar Rao, Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami, Union Ministers M. Venkaiah Naidu, Nirmala Sitharaman and Pon. Radhakrishnan were present.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicating to the Nation on Thursday the now renewed missing link of 9.5 km stretch of the National Highway (NH-49, Now New NH 87), that will link the sacred spot of Dhanushkodi, at the Southeastern tip of this pilgrim-island of Rameswaram, is a matter of joy for the locals [33].

Once the full NH link between Dhanushkodi-Arichalmunai to the mainland via Rameswaram and Pamban is a reality, locals believe it would give a big boost to not only religious tourism in this part of the island, but also give a logistical advantage to the Indian security forces maintain a strategic vigil along this segment of the coastal stretch. Already encroachments have come up along the completed part of the new NH link in the form of eateries, petty shops and so on as tourists in flow of late has picked up considerably to Dhanushkodi. But it is in this new road link the people here now see the possibility of this coastal spot regaining its lost cultural sheen and tourism potential [34].

Conclusion

Dhanushkodi city was unique in world History. It disappeared by the natural fury of the sea. In this beautiful city, the last missile father, the President of the Republic of India, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam memorial is places.

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