



PANDYA -CHOLA CONQUEST ON VIZHINJAM PORT

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ABSTRACT

Vizhinjam has cultural importance from the very ancient time and it was an inseparable part of Tamilakam. Vizhinjam from earlier times is a place of commercial and cultural importance. It was a marine town seaport and the capital of Ay kings who ruled the southern part of Kerala from 2nd century to 11th century AD. It was the most significant and well equipped in southern Travancore. Studies indicate that the Cholas and the Pandya's frequently attacked the Ay kingdom because of Vizhinjam mercantile and naval significance. Until the 14th century Vizhinjam was under the control of Cholas and Pandyas. By the beginning of the 16th century Vizhinjam again began to gain prominence as a trading center for the Europeans. However today Vizhinjam remains mainly as a fishing village rather than a port or administrative center. In this paper I would like to analysis the Pandya-Chola conquest on Vizhinjam the medieval port in Kerala. The main objective of the study is to understand the geographical features of Vizhinjam and to analysis the conquest of Pandyas and Cholas with inscriptional and literary evidences.

VIZHINJAM AND ITS ENVIORNIS

Vizhinjam is situated at Athiyanloor village in Neyyattinkara Taluk. It is seventeen kilometres south of Thiruvananthapuram. It is located between 08 22.798 N latitude, 76 59.370 E longitude. It is elevated from 71m above the sea level. The origin of the place name of Vizhinjam is in obscurity Siva Sankaran Nair put it that the term Vizhinjam might have derived from 'Vijayalayamandalam'. One of the mutts (pilgrim centre) of the south Travancore. Vijalaya became Vijaya and Vijayantham and finally became Vizhinjam¹. This coastal site is known in ancient records as Vilinam, Vilunum, Vilinda and Balita in the Periplus of the Erythrean Sea.

Vizhinjam is a coastal village. Geographically Vizhinjam and its surrounding can be divided into five -cut divisions namely seashore land, hilly area, sloppy region, valley, and plain². Among the natural divisions, the seashore land determined the course of the history of the Vizhinjam from the time immemorial.

The traders including the foreigners looked upon Vizhinjam seashore as a suitable place for carrying out trade and it had trade relations with

foreign countries from the antique time. On the geographical position result of the recent archaeological excavation and other contributory factors, it can be properly concluded that Balita the ancient seaport was Vizhinjam³.

The seashore land of the study area is noted for its scenic beauty, with charming, beach namely Kovalam. Hilly area, the next geographical area is forty meters higher than the sea and seashore. The third geographical unit sloppy region contains laterite and it is most fertile region. Tapioca, betel leaf and pepper are the main items of the agriculture.

However, the sediments deposited in the valley the fourth geographical entity, make the land very fertile. Valley region is soil erosion area. The fifth geographical unit of Vizhinjam is plain land where the coconut tree grows in an extensive scale. The other items of cultivation are mango and jack fruit and the agriculture is mainly based on rain⁴.

The region is characterised by the subtropical seasonal monsoon. The subtropical climate guarantees

¹ Hari Kattail, stalanama charitham(mal) pp22-23

² Haseen Raja, Typological analysis of Turquoise glasses ware from Vizhinjam Kerala p.7

³ Ajith Kumar ,The Antiquity of Vizhinjam p. 10

⁴ Ajith Kumar an appraisal of Vizhinjam history and Archaeology in the wake of recent Exploration. Pp72-80



heavy precipitation and moderate temperature. The moisture content in the area is high due to the close proximity to the sea. During the southwest monsoon season, humidity is very high in Vizhinjam region.

Humidity in the area rises higher during the southwest monsoon period. During the April-May months, the area experienced maximum day temperature up to 35°C where as in December-January months the temperature decreases to about 20°C. Monthly mean maximum temperature of Vizhinjam is 32.05°C and means minimum temperature is 23.9°C.

Vizhinjam is enriched with laterite soil. It is weathering product of rock and enriched in oxide of iron and aluminium. Laterite soil is originated from sedimentary formation. Laterite mainly consist of four minerals namely Kaolinite, Goethite, Hematite, Gibbsite and seven other elements namely sodium, potassium, calcium, Magnesium, silicon, Iron and Aluminium⁵.

Seashore contains coastal alluvial soil and beach sand. Charnokite formations are also present in Vizhinjam. Alluvial soils are seen in the coastal region of Vizhinjam. They show incipient development. The texture of the soil is dominated by sand fraction with very rapid diffusion. These soils are acidic and of low fertility level

The entire land in the study area except the various stretches of beach is settlement and under coconut cultivation. Intercropping is practiced in coconut plantations with a variety of crops such as vegetables, spices and other economically important plants⁶.

VIZHINJAM UNDER CONQUEST PANDYAS

The early Pandyas of the sangam period were one of the three main kingdoms of Ancient Tamil country. The Pandya dynasty is known as the Pandyas of Madurai. Pandyas are also mentioned in the inscriptions of Mauryan emperor Ashoka (3rd century BCE). In his inscriptions Asoka refers to the people of south India -The Cholas, Kerala puthras, Pandyas and satyaputra. The early Pandyas ruled between the 3rd century BCE and 3rd century CE.

The frequent conflicts between the Chera, Chola, and Pandya are well documented in ancient polity. The second half of the 12th century witnessed a major internal crisis in the Pandya kingdom. The family quarrels and sultanate invasion shattered the Pandyan Empire. The pandyan shifted the capital to

Tenkasi and continued to rule a small area until the end of the 16th century.

The inscriptions of pandyas reveal that around 7th -9th century Vizhinjam and surrounding area were not under the Ay vels. The Pandikkovai explicitly state that the Pandya rulers Arikesari Nedumaran defeated the Vellavan at Kottar, Narairas, and Vizhinjam. The conquest over the Ays by Nedumchadayan Parantaka Alias Maranchadayan According to the velvikudi grant was made during the 3rd year of his reign. Therefore, his conquest over Ay Vel is prior to 769 CE.

According to the Madras museum plates of the 7th regnal year of Maranchadayan word unsheathed his royal spear to destroy Vizhinjam and conquered Venmannan (ruler of Venad).

According to the large Sinnamanurplates the Pandyas vanquished Kerala at Vizhinjam⁷.

The first known Pandyan king who made an effort to conquer the Ay kingdom was Arikesari Varman (670CE-700CE). At the time of this conquest Ay kingdom extended from Nachilnadu to Vizhinjam and he defeated the ocean like arm of Ay king. Arikesari is also renowned in an old Tamil poem for having victory at Tirunelveli, Vizhinjam, Kottar, Sevar, Pulandai, Naraiyaru and Kadaiyal against the Chera king and at many other places against unnamed enemies. Though he subdued Vizhinjam, political reasons forced him to retreat from there and hence the Ays retained their authority and reputation.

His able ko-chadayan Ranadhira (700 CE - 730 CE) inflicted a severe defeat on the Ays in the battle of Maruthur near Tirunelveli. But there are no accounts about the invasion of Vizhinjam by him. The next Pandyan king Raja Simha (730CE-765CE) restored all the territories of the Pandyas⁸.

Raja Simha's son Nedumchadayan or Maranchadayan (765CE-815 CE) was greatly attracted by the prosperity of Vizhinjam and found the harbor as the most beautiful and attractive one. He attacked and captured this Ay capital in 781 CE. In succeeding decade, a powerful Chera Army attacked the Pandyas and captured Vizhinjam from Ays Maran Chadayan made preparation to recapture Vizhinjam and in the battle at Ay metropolitans he defeated the Ay king Karunandan and destructed the fort. Sri Vallabha the successor of Nedumchadayan also defeated Karunandan at Vizhinjam.

As a result, Karunandan left his headquarters at Vizhinjam and reached Kollam and established Kollam town after the death of Sri Vallabha Vizhinjam

⁵ Sreedhara Menon ,gazetteer of Trivandrum p-12

⁶ Rapid Environment impact Assessment report p.20

⁷ RajKumar, Encyclopedia of untouchable ancient medieval and modern Kerala, pp 180 -182

⁸ Ajith kumarpersonality of Vizhinjam page 165



again came into hands of the Ays. Evidences confirm that gradually the relation between the Ays and Pandyas became cordial and as a result of this, the late Ay king Vikramaditya Varaguna (885 CE-925 CE) who is known in Huzur copper plate as Vizhinja bharta helped The Pandyas in their fight against Cholas. But the rising power of the Chera in southern Kerala reduced his status to that of a feudatory⁹.

It seems that the early Pandyan kings established their sway in and around Cape Comorin with the fall of the Cape Comorin Kottar was exposed to frequent Pandyan invasion. Pandyan maintained continuous contact with Nachilnadu and before the 7th century CE.

During the reign of Atiyan Alakiyapandyan is said to have invaded the kingdom of Ays and defeated Atiyan and reduced him to the position of tributary chief of the Pandyan king. Puranar Tamil poet has described this historic fight in the Ahananuru and sings of the victorious flag of the Pandyan flying on the top of potiyil hills¹⁰.

Jayavaraman Parantaka Pandya who succeeded in the year 770 AD. Overran Nachilnadu subdued the Ay chief and made him a vassal. Around 787AD Parantaka advanced to Venad and conquered it with elephant horses and treasure. Subsequently the Pandypower penetrated deep beyond the borders of Venad and soon it reached Vizhinjam¹¹. When the Pandyan control declined the Cholas capitalized the Political situations.

CHOLAS

Cholas are one of the longest ruling dynasties in the southern region of India. The reign of Cholas began in the 9th century when they defeated the Pallavas to come to power. The earliest datable reference to the Chola are in inscriptions from the 3rd BCE left by Asoka. The cholas established their power in the fertile valley of Kaveri river.

The early chola kings are mentioned in the Sangam literature. The sangam literature also records legends about mythical chola kings. Two names are prominent among those chola kings known to have existed who feature in sangam literature Karikala Chola and Kongannan. Uraiyur was their oldest capital. Kaveripattanam also served as an early Chola capital¹².

Vijayala was the founder of the Imperial Chola dynasty. Thanjavur became the capital of the imperial Chola dynasty. The Chola dynasty was at the peak of its influence and power during the medieval period. The later Chola (1070-1279CE) was led by a capable ruler. The Hoysala played a device role in the politics of the Tamil country. They thoroughly exploited the lack of unity among the Tamil kingdom. After the decline of the Chola Empire in the 13th century the Cholas went to obscurity.

About the beginning of the 10th century CE south Travancore was annexed by the Chola Empire by Parantaka I (907CE-955CE). His inscriptions are found in Travancore especially in suchindram¹³. In the 10th century CE the Cheras (Kulashekharas) became a formidable power in south India. Under Goda Ravi Varma (917 CE -944 CE) almost domain Vizhinjam was transformed into the southernmost port of the Chera realm.

Goda Ravi Varma's contemporaries Aditya Cholas and Parantaka Chola maintained a very cordial relation with the Cheras. Parantaka Chola married the daughter of the Chera king and it gave an impetus to the relation. But the attack of southern Kerala by the Cholas damaged their relationship. As a result of this Goda Ravi Varma made all preparation for a battle against the Cholas and he strengthened the security of the Southern margins of his empire and transformed Vizhinjam into a military center. But till the ascending Raja Raja the great in 985 CE the Cholas policy towards chera's was one of cordiality.

In the reign of Raja Raja the greatest of the Chola rulers that Chola authority was firmly established over the which of Pandyakingdom including Nachilnadu¹⁴. Several inscriptions in the Cholapuram Temple near Kottar bear witness to the Chola conquest of Travancore. His contemporary Chera king was Baskara Ravi Varma (962CE -1019 CE). In the fourth year of his reign Raja Raja captured Nachilnadu and Tirunelveli region from pandyas the reached Vizhinjam and defeated Vizhinjam.

In this fearful battle Raja Raja sacked Kandalur and assumed the title 'Kandalur Salai kalam Arutha Rajarajan. To wed the close of 999CE almost all the region of south Travancore including Vizhinjam and Kollam came under the control of Cholas¹⁵. Kottar which was the southernmost military outpost in the Chola dominion was named Mummudicholanallur and a Chola garrison (nilappdai) was permanently stained

⁹ Idib,166

¹⁰ Ahananuru stanza 162

¹¹ The Travancore Land revenue manual VOL I 1935 p 186

¹² RCMajumdar Ancient India 1987 p 137

¹³ TAS XI p 237 -238

¹⁴ TAS VOL XI p 1-6

¹⁵ Ajith kumar Personality of Vizhinjam page 165



there¹⁶. Thus by the end of the reign of Raja Raja Chola south Travancore became an integral part of the Chola kingdom.

His successor Rajendra Chola's suzerainty reached as far as Karunady and he set up a military post at Kottar. At the time of his accession Chera restored almost all the places occupied by the Cholas. Like his father Rajendra chola followed a policy of territorial aggression and led an expedition to Kerala to recapture Vizhinjam. Unable to resist the Chola storm, the Cheras retained and Vizhinjam once again became part of the Chola Empire and he renamed it as 'Rajendra Chola Pattanam'.

During the time of Kulothunga Chola (1070CE-1120 CE) the successor of Rajendra chola the Chola domination in south subsequently reduced. The Chera king Ramavarma Kulashekhara, who ascended the throne in 1090 CE determined to rescue Kerala from the hands Cholas. After overthrowing the Cholas Rama Varma Kulashekhara, the last of the Kulashekhara of Mahodayapuram migrated to Quilon and founded the Venad kingdom and Vizhinjam became the part of the Venad.

Decline of the Ay power exposed to repeated drop of the Pandya's and Cholas when the ruling Chera family disappeared in the midst of Chera -Chola war around 1036 CE. Venad declared independence.

CONCLUSION

Vizhinjam located at the extreme south western tip of south Asia served as an important port throughout the history of the region the location is economically and geopolitically significant as a key point connecting the shipping between southeast Asia and the middle east. The rising power and prosperity of the Ays and commercial significance of Vizhinjam attracted the attention of the pandyas and cholas to gain the sovereignty of Vizhinjam and both these dynasties ruled it in various periods. Regular attacks of these powers for political supremacy reduced the glory of Vizhinjam. The political chaos and confusion created by the pandyas and cholas came to an end with the emergence of venad Kingdom. Its natural harbour abundance of spice and pearl fisheries attracted foreign traders from time immemorial. The rising prosperity of Vizhinjam as a seaport prompted Ays to shift their capital or Kulapuri from Thiruvattar to Vizhinjam. The gentle position and wealth of Vizhinjam around the jealousy of the Pandya and the Cholas and from seventh to 12th century CE a series of attempts were made to capture Vizhinjam. The regular attacks of

these powers for political supremacy reduced the glory of Vizhinjam. The political chaos and confusion created by the Pandya's and cholas came to an end with the emergence of the Venad Kingdom.

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¹⁶ TAS VOL 1 p 2)



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