

ECOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL REVIEW ON PAMBA – THE RIVER VALLEY WITH AN UNAQUAINTED HISTORY NOW ENDURING AN EBBING ECOLOGICAL BALANCE

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Abstract

Rivers are considered as life saviours. They play important role in the economic and cultural development of human society. From the Vedic times it is said that nature and human kind forms an inseparable part of life sustaining system . But the greedy indiscriminate human activities on the environment is demoting the planet's life supporting capacity and resulting in debilitation of natural resources.

Keywords:

Introduction

Rivers are the most dynamic of all waterscapes on this living planet. Like arteries they connect different ecosystems, lives and livelihoods . The river course is determined by the valleys and the mountain ranges it passes through, their slope, gradient and soil structure. It is born in hill streams, flows down the gradient carrying sand, minerals, silt and as the river flows down it leaves behind the sediments . All these processes shapes the rivers profile and character, resulting in the formation of valleys, plains , wetlands, deltas etc . Each streams and rivers arising from the Western Ghats of Kerala is peculiar with its own characteristics.

Kerala is blessed with 44 rivers out of which 41 are West flowing and the rest towards East . The origin of most of them is within the Western Ghats . Majority of the river have shorter length which contradicts the high dependency on water because of the very high population density ¹.

This paper focuses mainly on the history, recent excavations and ecological problems of the Pamba river which is the third longest river in the State of Kerala and the longest in the former Princely State of Travancore. Pamba originates from the Pulachimalai hills in the Peerumedu Plateau in the Western Ghats at an altitude of 1650 m and its catchment area is charged by 2235 sq Km . Flowing 176 Km long, the river is charged by 288 rivulets and streams . The tributaries of the river includes Azhuthayar, Kakkiyar, Kakkattar, Kallaar, Madatharuvi, Kozhithodu, Varattar, Kuttumperoor Etc. The river Pamba enriches the lands of Pathanamthitta District, Kuttanadu area of Alappuzha District and few areas of Kottayam District . Before emptying into Vembanad lake, pamba is joined by the Achenkovil river . It shares its Northern boundary with the Manimala river basin and the Southern boundary with Achenkovil river basin. The upper catchment area is composed of dense evergreen

¹ N . K. Sukumaran Nair, Pamba Nadhi : Paristhithiyum paripalanavum (Trivandrum : Kerala Bhasha Institute 2012) , 30

and moist deciduous forests . The average annual rainfall of the pamba river basin is about 3600 mm.

Physiographically the Pamba river basin is classified into three distinct natural zones that is the High land, Mid land and the Low land . One of the traditional livelihoods both upstream and in the flood plains is fishing . Kuttanaad is called as the rice bowl of Kerala as the paddy cultivation largely depends on the water from this river . The sandy banks of Pamba witnessed the emergence and growth of many cultural and religious centres. Sabarimala temple amid the luscious forests is the most important religious center for Hindus and they believe bathing in the river absolve ones sins . Then there is Maramon Convention which is considered as the largest Christian Convention in Asia . Aranmula is a unique cultural village on the banks of Pamba . The most famous snake boat race during the festival of Onam is conducted in the Pamba river . From ancient time onwards the river served as the medium for transportation of goods and commodities . The ancient inland port city of Nelcynda is located near Niranam which is at the confluence of Pamba and Achenkovil rivers . History also records the presence of Buddhism from B C 400 onwards in and around the areas of Pamba valley . We also get historical accounts about the trade activities, life patterns and occupation of people, religious centres and activities, ancient ports and markets, land revenue records etc from Unnunili Sandesham, Eravikorthinen Copper plates, Knanaya Thomin Copper plates, Tharissapalli Copper plates, Mampally Inscriptions, Greek records, Kannettupattu, Thiruvaimozhi, Peripus of Erythrean Sea ² .

In the year of 2018, there happened a big break when it comes to the history of Pamba . After the disastrous flood of 2018 that hit Kerala, many of the river banks were eroded . Then fisher folks and natives near Aranmula noticed some kind of Hindu idols and terracotta images stuck in the roots of the mango tree which was uprooted during the deluge and they immediately contacted the Kerala Department of Archaeology . The site is under excavation procedures by many historians and experts like M R Raghava Warriar, M G S Narayanan, K P Sreeranganathan, Rajeev Puliyoar, S Bhoopesh, Rajesh Kumar and have opined about it . The artefacts included terracotta figurine of a man's bust, Saptamatrikas, parts of male figurines, Naga images etc . Historians have not arrived at a conclusion regarding to which century these artefacts belong, so they will be subjected to Thermoluminescence dating ³ . It has been speculated that these artefacts are possibly from the mysterious Pamba civilization and there is also opinion that the holy site which housed all these idols and figures were constructed by the local tribal peoples . It can be said without doubt that this discovery is underlining the historical importance of the Pamba river valley for the Indian civilization ⁴ .

² Dr.R. Girish Kumar,Pamba Nadhi : Paristhithiyum Samskaravum (Trivandrum : Kerala Bhasha Institute 2014) 85.

³ Radha Krishnan Kuttar, " Terracotta shards at Aranmula point to Pamba's Rich Pat", The Hindu on the web, 30th September ,2018

⁴ E D Whelan," Flood Reveals Ancient Idols Holding Secrets to Early Hinduism and a Long Lost Civilization",Ancient Origins- Reconstructing the Story of Humanity's Past on web 28th Decemeber 2018

Keeping all these in accounts, it is high time to think about conserving this historically important river and its valley as it faces seriously dangerous level of exploitation . Due to fertilizers, pesticides and other chemical compounds used in agriculture, sand mining, sewage disposal and industrial waste from towns and cities, electricity projects / dams etc are hindering the natural flow of the river⁵ . There is also serious ecological problems in times of pilgrimage to Sabarimala and other conventions that happen in the banks of this river . Tons and tons of plastic, other non bio-degradable objects and all other sorts of pollutants are killing the river inch by inch . It is high time to protect and conserve these water bodies, which are awaiting the death calls soon in the near future . Don't let our future generation to know about these rivers from the text books that a river named Pamba which was once the lifeline of their ancestors flowed through these places shown in the maps and this is applicable not only to Pamba but to every water bodies of India .

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⁵ “ South Asia Network on Dams,Rivers and people”, State of India' s Rivers for India Rivers Week 2016 on web 11th April 2017

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