

## UNKNOWN CIVILIZATION OF PAZHAYARU

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### Abstract

*Civilizations have risen on the banks of rivers. Rivers provide people with the necessities of life. Though early life of people started in and around caves and thickly wooded jungles, it advanced to become cultured only on banks of rivers. In Tamilnadu, the small but perennial rivers have been the centres of some famous Civilizations. But the Civilization of a river bed in the extreme south, i.e, the Pazhayaru river valley civilization is not much known to the people. The Pazhayaru river, the remaining part of the lost Paghruli river system, though small in length, is high in civilization. It had created some of the best known cities, towns, trading centres, centres of worship and cultural integration and harmony.*

**Keywords:** pazhayaru, paghruli, kumari continent, lemurian continent

### Introduction

In the *First Tamil Sangam*, according to Nakkirar's *Commentary on Iraiyanar Ahapporul*, a galaxy of poets existed at *Then Madurai* perhaps in the *Lost Lemuria*. After the first deluge, the Sangam and its capital were shifted to *Kapadapuram* which finds mention in *Ramayana* and *Arthasastra*. A second deluge submerged *Kapadapuram* also and thereafter the Sangam was moved to *Manalur*. A third deluge submerged *Manalur* also and thereafter the Pandyan king shifted his capital to the present *Madurai*, which became the seat of the Third Sangam. The poets of the Third Sangam collected the poems that escaped destruction, along with those sung during their period and delivered them to the world in the form of the present Sangam literature, which depicts the Tamil Culture of the Third Sangam (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. to 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.)<sup>1</sup>.

### Kumari Continent

Kumari Continent was a part of the Lost Lemurian continent which went under the sea, millions of years ago, when mankind did not exist on earth. But there is a possibility of the origin of man and his civilization in the Kumari Continent. This view is supported by scholars like Scott Eliot, Sir Walter Raleigh, Hackel, Sir John Evans, V.R.R. Dikshitar, N. Mahalingam and K. Appadurai. It is also refuted by scholars like K.A. Nilakanta Sastri and K.K. Pillay. But, on the basis of the Sangam and Post-Sangam literature, we can deduce that the Kumari Continent was a reality and was one of the cradles of the first man and the earliest civilization which later on spread to North India, Iran, Egypt, etc. and helped the creation of civilization there. It has been argued that the Tamil culture was the basis of the Indus Valley Civilization and the Mediterranean Civilization. According to S.K. Chatterjee, 75% of the present Indian culture is non-Aryan of which 65%

is Dravidian (Tamil.) Therefore, one can safely assert that the Tamil Culture which originated in the submerged Kumari Continent was the earliest, which in course of time, spread all over India and the Mediterranean region and became the basis and bedrock of all ancient civilizations of the world such as Egyptian and Sumerian. This fact has been further attested to by linguistic archaeology undertaken by Sathur Sekaran and others who have found out Tamil roots in many of the world languages.<sup>2</sup>

### **River Valley Civilization**

It is a well-known historical fact that the great civilizations of the ancient world such as Egyptian, Sumerian, Babylonian, etc. originated and flourished on the fertile basins of the perennial rivers like Nile, Tigris and the Euphrates, etc. In India also two great ancient civilizations originated and flourished on the banks of river Indus in North India and the Tamil Civilization on the banks of river Paghruli in the far south of India. Strangely enough, both the rivers are not in existence now. The Indus River now not in India but in Pakistan, has dried up and gone underground and river Paghruli was swallowed up by the sea. Details about the first could be collected from archaeological remains and the other from myths, legends, oral traditions and some literary reminiscences.

### **River Paghruli**

River Paghruli is mentioned in Sangam literature such as Purananuru, and post-sangam works such as Silappadikaram and Kalithogai. Silappadikaram declares that since the Paghruli River and Kumari mountains were swallowed up by the cruel sea, the Pandyan king Nediyon made his

capital shifted to Kapatapuram of Ramayana fame and cut canals of the lost river. Geologists tell us that the vast stretch of land that lay beyond the present Cape Kumari was submerged under the roaring sea owing to huge tidal waves and tectonic changes. An oral tradition supported by some Tamil works refers to three deluges which submerged the Kumari Continent lying between river Paghruli and River Kumari emanating from Mount Kumari. Sir J.E. Tennent a Ceylonese scholar is of the opinion that all these deluges happened in historic times, the first one before 2000 B.C., and second before 600 B.C., and the third before 400 B.C., and thus the Tamil – speaking continent went under the sea some 4300 years ago.

Tamil literature, as in Silappadikaram, says that the river Paghruli and the Mount Kumari were swallowed up by the first deluge. The Kumari Continent lying between river Paghruli and river Kumari was 700 kathams in length and was divided into forty-nine Nadus (divisions).<sup>3</sup> It was ruled by Pandyan king Nilamtharutiruvu Nediyon. He had his capital at *Then Madurai* which was situated on the banks of river Paghruli.<sup>4</sup>

### **Legends about the River**

According to Sthalapurana of Sucindram, Indra commenced a severe penance at Gnanaranya in order to secure redemption for his misbehaviour towards Ahalya, the devoted wife of sage Gautama. To get water in the place Indra directed his elephant Airavatha to form a river to flow from Malaya Mountain. The elephant proceeded to the mountain and gorging by its tusk caused a river to flow towards Gnanaranya. This episode led to the river being called

Dantanadi or Kottaru. The town on the bank of river also came to be known by the same name. The place where Indra attained purity is called Sucindram. A later interpretation brought to bear upon the name of Kottaru, *i.e.*, it is derived from the Tamil words Kodu and Aru which denote mountain and river respectively.<sup>5</sup> This, it appears is strengthened by the location of Kottaru which is on the bank of the river Pazhayaru, surrounded by beautiful hills and dales.<sup>6</sup>

### **River – a Symbol of Prosperity**

The name 'Nanchil', is the corruption of the pure Tamil term Nancei (cultivable, prosperous) land. It is made prosperous by the river. The ancient river, that rendered richness to the soil is 'Pazhayaru' known as Paghruli river in early antiquity. Paghruli may in the long run have been corrupted into Paraliaru, which, in turn, could be corrupted into Pazhayaru: Paghruli = Parali = Pazhayaru, which means 'the ancient river'. Since the original Paghruli was lost to the sea, the Pandyan king made it Parali in memory of the old river.

Many Tamil scholars of Nanchilnadu believe that Pazhayaru is the corruption of Paghruli. The Tamil scholar K.N. Sivaraja Pillai in his book Nanchil Venba published in 1935, has referred to the same through his verses.<sup>7</sup>

In the last two thousand years many changes have taken place on the face of earth. When probed further and deeper, the hidden history of this river of Kanyakumari could be traced. The significance of Pazhayaru is referred to by the poet Adhimoola Perumal.<sup>8</sup>

### **Paghruli – Significance**

Another derivation seems to be interesting: All rivers are formed by the merger of drops of water (gy; + Jsp = g/Wsp), and this river is one among them.<sup>9</sup> Rain water, ground water and ice water lead to the flow of rivers. It is a river which takes its course in the Malaya malai – Pothiyil or Agastya hills, named after the disciple of Lord Siva in the south. Since it is the oldest river in the south, it is called Pazhayaru (Paghruli).

### **Archaeological site on the banks of the river Pazhayaru**

Excavations carried out in the 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D. by the then Travancore Archaeological Department led to the discovery of rare earthen and stone articles from Karuppukkottai. Vases, urns, pots, plates, pans and jars made of mud, and idols, boundary stones and inscriptions on stone were some of the items unearthed. On the stone idols were engraved figures of naga, yakshi, Krishna, etc. There is a magnificent figure of a soldier with a bow and a boundary stone with beautifully carved letters on one side and a cobra's head on the other.

Karuppukkottai, the village gets its name from Karuppukkatti. Preparation of Karuppatti (Karuppukatti jiggery) was one of the earliest occupations of the people of this region. Karuppukatti can not be called Karumbukatti (sugarkandi). A stone press of one king Karumbu is still lying in a paddy field in Pathiyara. The area was known as 'Pattalathoppu'. Relics of an ancient culture and civilization have been excavated from this area which extended to about two acres.

The boundaries of Karuppukkottai are Theroor, also known as Azhakistanallur on the east, Oottuvazhmadam seri on the west, Raja Narayana Sathurvedhi mangalam also known as Puthukramam on the north and Sabaiyarkulam seri on the south. Stone inscriptions reveal that the village existed as "Karumpazhur" in the ancient days in the midst of villages like Uthirampatti,<sup>10</sup> Erumaiarai, Manali, Nambiarkulam, Kadaneri and Therkulam. It had fertile paddy fields and tanks and lakes for irrigation. In the records of the Travancore Archaeological Department, the name of the village has been entered as Karithurai.<sup>11</sup>

The stone inscriptions in the Elaya Nainar Temple at Theroor engraved by King Rajendra Chola (A.D. 1013 – 1045) in the early part of the eleventh century A.D. bears the name of the village. Further, the fact that "Gangai Konda Chola Valluvanadan", who lived in the twelfth century A.D. donated large areas to the Kailasanathar Temple in the village for conducting rituals is engraved on a monument in the wall on the southern side. Inscriptions on one of the stone pillars record of a donation of paddy fields by one Kaliyugatha Meyyan to the Brahmins of the village in A.D. 1462.<sup>12</sup> These archaeological evidences make us believe that an ancient civilization existed on the river Pazhayaru. The villages, their occupants, their profession, temples, plains of worship and

production of commodities and their use, sale and export are all evidences to the prevalence of an age old civilization on the banks of this river.

### Conclusion

The land of the Tamils in the extreme south with its capital first at *Then Madurai*, and then at *Kapatapuram* was lost to the generations. However, though there are very scanty records to prove the authenticity of the survival of such a civilization, it cannot be summarily dismissed as a legend or a myth or hearsay story. Tradition, finding recollection in some Tamil Classical Works and post-classical literature, are preserved in the minds of the succeeding generations of those who met with great deluges. This tradition of the deluges and loss of land is further corroborated by European geologists, geographers, critics of classical works, paleographers and others. What is needed, in the light of these is an in depth study of this lost civilization. Unearthing the area, its specialty and its characteristics could be possible only if underwater archaeological surveys, explorations and excavations are conducted. If Governments, both at the Centre and State come forward, leaving aside all kinds of parochial inhibitions, to undertake this task, it will certainly result in the unraveling of one of the oldest civilizations of humanity.

### References

- (1) K.R. Hanumanthan, "The Paghruli River Civilization" (article), ISIAC & BISS, Tamilnadu, 1995, p.26.
- (2) Ibid, p. 27
- (3) Tenga nadu seven, Madurai nadu seven, Munpalai nadu seven, Pinpalai nadu seven, Kunra nadu seven, Kuna karai nadu seven, and Kurumporai nadu seven.

- (4) K.R. Hanumanthan, op. cit., p. 26
- (5) Kotu or Kottu has various meanings: i) 'line', 'peak', 'curve', ii) a straight line of mountain or peak in the mountain as the top most spot, the geographic curve, the river and the location of the township may reflect these. It is generally accepted that the river takes a curvature so as to create the township of Kottaru (Kottu + aru).
- (6) S. Padmanabhan, Nagacult and Nagaraja Temple, Nagercoil, 1980, p. 17.
- (7) சங்கநூல் செய்யும் தனிப் ப.:றுளி யாதே  
துங்கிகத் தங்கும் ப.:றுளியாய்ப் - பொங்கும்  
பழையாறாம் வந்து பரந்ததென்ப.  
நாஞ்சில் வெண்பா, 67
- (8) "நாட்டுக்குப் பேரழகாய் நலந்தழைக்கும் வித்தாய்  
நஞ்சையொடு புஞ்சைக்கும் நற்பலன் தந்து அறிஞர்  
பாட்டுக்கும் ஒளிதந்து பாய்ந்தோடும் ஆறு  
ப.:றுளியாறு எனப்பகரும் பழையாறு தானே"
- (9) K. Patchaimal, Nanchil Valluvan Avvaiyar (T1.), Samithoppu, 1999, p.16.
- (10) Uthirampatti is the only village situated on the banks of the river Pazhayaru having the surname 'Patti'. All the Harijans of this village are living in huts and they are immersed into object poverty. The families of the people in public service who happen to die while they were rendering service, were provided with sufficient lands in memory of their death. This land is called Uthirampatti.
- (11) P.Ramachandran, "The Pazhayar Experience" (article), The Hindu, Trivandrum, 22 March 1992.
- (12) P.Ramachandran, Pazhayattankarai Nagarigam (T1.), Unpublished work, Nagercoil, p.51.

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