



RESEARCH ARTICLE

ARANMULA GLOBAL HERITAGE VILLAGE -A SOCIO-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Sreekumar.V.N

Department of Sociology, University of Kerala, Kariavattam, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala,

ARTICLE INFO

Received 14th, March, 2016,
Received in revised form 27th,
April, 2016, Accepted 13th, May, 2016,
Published online 18th, June, 2016

Keywords:

Aranmula Air Port Project ,Aranmula Glocal
Heritage Village,Socio- historical Analysis

ABSTRACT

The Airport project, in the central part of Kerala went into controversy as the famous Aranmula Sree Parthasarathy temple is in the vicinity of the project. This created strong resistance from the public, and struggle against the project is going on. The green tribunal observed that the project would adversely affect the environment of the area and would have disastrous impact on it. The tribunal rejected the arguments of KGS Group and the Kerala Government. Based on the controversial no objection certificate, submitted by the Kerala Government, the Ministry of Environment and Forests had cleared the project in November, 2013. The court said that KGS Group had not conducted a serious study about the environment impact of the project. On this background this study was conducted

Copyright © 2016 Sreekumar.V.N., This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

INTRODUCTION

The Airport Project, in the central part of Kerala went into controversy as the famous Aranmula Sree Parthasarathy temple is in the vicinity of the project. This created strong resistance from the public, and struggle against the project is going on. The green tribunal observed that the project would adversely affect the environment of the area and would have disastrous impact on it. The tribunal rejected the arguments of KGS Group and the Kerala Government. Based on the controversial no objection certificate, submitted by the Kerala Government, the Ministry of Environment and Forests had cleared the project in November, 2013. The court said that KGS Group had not conducted a serious study about the environment impact of the project. They did not even mention about paddy fields and hills in the proposed site. The company did not even conduct a public hearing over the issue. Aranmula Paithruka Grama Karma Samati [APGKS] had approached the Green Tribunal against the order of the Environment Ministry and hence the latest order. The airport is planned to build in around 500 acres with a total investment of Rs 2000 crore. The Kerala State Biodiversity Board submitted a report to the government in March 2013, expressing its reservations over the land use changes and ecological imbalance that the project will entail. The Board observed that 80 per cent of the 500 acres earmarked for the project were paddy fields. Conversion of paddy fields would impact on the remaining wetlands, disturb the food chain, and accelerate the depletion of fish resources as well as other flora and fauna in the Pamba river basin, the report said. In April 2013, the tribunal had granted an interim

stay on the project banning any construction at the site. It also stayed the Kerala Government's order to convert the 500 acres of land for industrial purpose. However, the Tribunal set aside its order on 30 April 2013, dismissing the petition filed by the Action Council, challenging various decisions related to the project including industrial area notification and the NOC given by the Kerala Government.

Aranmula is a temple village in Pathanamthitta district, the state of Kerala, surrounded by undulating green hillocks and girdled by the holly river Pampa. The place lies at a distance of around 128 km from Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala. Holy River Pampa girdles the verdant village and is intertwined with the culture and economy here with lush green hillocks, paddy fields, rubber plantations and churches- the hamlet mirrors an idyllic panorama. Fertile wetlands, locally called *puncha*, richer biodiversity and a pleasant climate make Aranmula, a good model of the eco friendly culture of Kerala. Here it is work recommending that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDPE), in association with the government of India, had declared Aranmula as a global heritage value, a decade back.

History and Geography

The word Aranmula is derived from the event where lord Krishna arrived travelling through the Pampa river by a small boat made by six bamboos (*Aarrumula*) and hence the name Aranmula. During the first phase Aranmula was the part of *AayiNadu* and later part of *Odanadu*. In course of time it becomes part of south core and then Pandalam Kingdom. Again it came under *Mahodayapuram* land dominated and ruled by *Chera* King. In

*✉ Corresponding author: Sreekumar.V.N

Department of Sociology, University of Kerala, Kariavattam, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala,

1937 Mahatma Gandhi visited the Aranmula temple for the purpose of the participation in 1st annual meeting of Temple Entry Proclamation. The first school of the village as Kottaram Pallikoodam were founded in 1864.

Aranmula Grama Panchayat is the local governing body of the Aranmula. The panchayat is divided into eighteen electoral wards which together an area of 24 sq. km with a population of approximately 29,000. Aranmula is situated in Kulanada block of Kozhenchery taluk in Pathanamthitta district set in atypical rural background with wetlands, streams, and river and spurs hills of Western Ghats, nearby important towns is Pathanamthitta (10km), Pandalam (14 km), and Chenganoor (10). The panchayat office is situated between kottakkam and kalarikkodu.

During the first phase Aranmula was part of Kollam district. Then later it founded to Alapuzha but later it came under Pathanamthitta district during its formation in 1983. The local administration has taken as the task of solid waste management seriously, making Aranmula not just beautiful but very clean as well. Geographically Aranmula is connected to the famous Kuttanadu wetlands. One of the main features is the availability of the water is plenty. The village has several water bodies including streams, ponds, wetland and the river Pampa. Which are interconnected. The hills, valleys and wetland are very fragile. The region experiences three distinct weather conditions: winter, summer and monsoon.

Bio- Diversity: Plants, Fish and Birds

On the whole 212 species of plants were recorded from the area of these 27 are endemic to the Western Ghats and 110 are economically important mainly for their medicinal properties of the 212, 88 are wetland species which include those found along the earthen bunds and in wet areas.

In total 60 species, including those reported in the present and earlier studies were recorded from the area out of the 42% are endemic to the western 6.6% endangered and 5% vulnerable. The species such as *wall ago*, *ater*, *channa maralius*, *c. Striata*, and *labeodussumeiri* and *horabagrus brachusoma* are highly sought after. Among these *Labeodussumeri* is an icon of Pampa fisheries resources and it is endemic to the river feeding the Vembadu Lake. About 10% of the total species found are ornamental value. It may be noted that 35 species are migratory, migrating from the river Pampa to the paddy lands and wetlands for breeding.

At the present, 80 species of birds were found in the region and 85 were recorded in 2006, by Kottayam Nature Society. Of these eight species are migratory and two, namely Oriental Darter and Black-headed Ibis, are in the near threatened category.

Ecosystem

The *puncha* paddy fields and wetlands in Aranmula, Mallapuzhassery, Kidangannur, Elanthur, Mezhuveli and in the adjacent villages from the flood plains of river Pampa are become inseparable part of not only the overall ecology of the area, but also the cultural heritage of this area. Aranmula is also known for its natural heritage such as flora, fauna, landscape and its natural resources.

River Pampa is the third largest river in Kerala after Periyar and Bharathappuzha. Sabarimala, the hill shrine of lord Ayyappa is situated near holy Pampa. Legend has it that lord Ayyappa as a new born was found in the banks of river Pampa. Devotees take a dip in Pampa before and after visiting Sabarimala as Pampa is revered as Dakshina Ganga has its origin in Pulachimala.

Economy

Agriculture is the main stay of the economy and it is the primary occupation of the people. About 65 percent people are dependent on this sector. The tree, fondly called 'Puthariyal', that has stood witness to a bygone area of agrarian glory seen in front of Aranmula Temple is the prestigious symbol of their agricultural tradition (karshika samskrithi). Paddy is the most important crop cultivated in the wetlands. Topioca, Pulses are the important dry land crops. Other major crops are coconut, banana, pepper etc. Rubber is another important crop; with its plantations covering over 146 square km. Aranmula which is predominantly agrarian has achieved tremendous growth in the agrarian sector while industrially it has not reached that growth.

Art

Aranmula is also famous for its metal *AranmulaKannadi* (metal mirrors) which is a hand made metal alloy mirror made by the traditional craftsman. This is a unique art which is not found anywhere else in the world. Unlike the normal silvered glass mirrors, being a metal alloy mirror, which eliminates secondary reflections and aberrations typical of back surface mirrors. It is a unique metal mirrors are the result of Kerala's rich cultural and metallurgical traditions, and have great historical and cultural value produced by a single extended family in Aranmula, Aranmula metal mirror manufacturing was staged in the early 18th century. It represents a fascinating area of culture and technological curiosity. The origin of metal mirror of Aranmula is closely connected with the Aranmula Parthasarathy Temple which is deemed to be the nerve centre of Pampa valley civilization.

Cultural Centres: Vijana Kalavedi and Vasthu Vidya Gurukulam

The Vijana Kalavedi, set up in 1977 by a French lady, Louba Schild, who came to Kerala in 1968 and learnt Kathakali', with assistance from UNESCO and the government of India, this centre has grown to be very popular in promoting Kerala's culture artists, researchers and culturally oriented tourists; preserving the traditional arts and crafts of Kerala in their natural and spiritual context and also fostering the artistic education of youngsters in Kerala. The Vijana Kalavedi cultural centre has kept alive various art forms including dance forms, Kathakali, Mohiniattm, Bharathanatyam and the dance like martial arts form, Kalaripayattu.

The Gurukulam at Aranmula is the only institution in India where the ancient Indian architecture, and mural paintings and Vasthuvidya Systematically taught. The mural art set up by the Gurukulam, helps to understand the process and rituals that go into each painting as the brush and natural colours are appeared, the outline drawn and several brush strokes go over each line to come up with the real paintings. These paintings were initially only seen on the walls of temples. The Gurukulam has also initiated the painting of Murals at the Bhagavathy temple in

Kadammanitta 12 km away from Aranmula. One can see this ancient art being still practiced.

Religious Centres

Aranmula Sree Parthasarathy Temple

Aranmula Parthasarathy Temple is one of the most ancient temples of Kerala. The presiding deity is Parthasarathy (Lord Krishna). The temple is located about 16 km from Thiruvalla in Kerala, on the banks of the Pampa River. This is one of the most famous and ancient Krishna temples in Kerala, supposedly linked to the legends of Mahabharata.

The Aranmula Temple has four towers that are located at the entrance of the temple on the exterior wall. There is a flight of eighteen steps that lead to the eastern tower while 57 descending steps from the northern tower reaches the Pampa River. The legend associated with the history of the Aranmula Temple is that this temple was built by Arjuna. It is believed that this temple was built near Sabarimala near Nilackal.

The image was brought her in a raft that was made from six pieces of bamboo, and hence the name Aranmula was given.

The legend also says that this temple was built by Arjuna to redress the sin of killing Karna unarmed in the battle field. The temple here has fine murals from the 18th century.

It is also believed that the main idol was originally the 'Thevara Vighraha' (one which was used for daily personal worship) of Arjuna the third Pandava. It is also believed that the *thevaras* Vighraha of the four other *Pandavas* are placed nearest four villages namely *Thrichittaat*, *Thrippuliyoor*, *Thiruvanvandoor* near Chengannur, and *Thrikkodithanam* near Changangassery.

Aranmula Palace

Aranmula Palace is a traditional keralite palace which has a history of 200 years. Aranmula palace also known as Aranmula Vadakke Kottaram is the halt of place of the holy journey 'Thiruvabharana Khoshayatra' at Aranmula. Built many of wood and with the traditional Kerala architecture, this place is on the banks of river Pampa. It has cool interiors with three sides wooden. It stands as a figure of tradition.

Pulikkunnumala Mahadeva Temple and Other Temples

This temple situated four kilometres from Aranmula. The old temple is traditionally said to be the worship place of the Pandavas. Other small temples are Ganapati temple, Kadakal temple, Punnamthottam temple, Kuruvilakkadu temple, and Kaipuzha temple. The village where the majority of the inhabitants are Hindus has been announced as a heritage village. The Parthasarathy Temple is considered as one of the 108 Thirupatis. The culture and heritage of village nourished around this temple. The series of temples nearly by, groves and hills shrine, all linked to the main temple at Aranmula of Lord Parthasarathy, are part of an ancient temple cantered settlement and there are mutual linkages between all these.

Aranmula Jalolsavam (Snake Boat Race)

The holy river Pampa is the life line of Central Travancore and the Snake Boats (*Chundan Valloms*) are one of the cultural gifts to the Keralites by the River Pampa. The major snake boat

race are conducted in the Pampa waters at various localities, via Ayroor, Malakkara, Pulinkunn, Mannar, Nerettupuram, Payippau, as well as Aranmula. The snake boat race (*Chundanvallomkali*) is one of the important 'Traditional Game' in Kerala.

Aranmula boat festival is conducted annually to the Onam festival of Kerala. It was started in connection with the *Thiruvonathoni* which starts on Uthradam (day before ThiruOnam) evening from Katoor *Mahavishnu* Temple with provision for the 'Nivedyam' and 'Samoohasadya' (mass feast) on *Thiruvonam* at temple.

The water carnival pageantry is held as a part of the anniversary calibrations of the Idol installation of Aranmula Temple. It has no parallel as it is commemorative of an ancient tradition rooted about six hundred years in history. The provisions for Thiruvonam at temple are offered by Mangattu Bhatathiri, the *karnavar* (the eldest member) of Mangattu *illom*. There will be a representative from the family on the thoni (canon), as part of the tradition. It is a nice sight to see the thoni moving down the river Pampa without roving. The thoni is symbolic of Garuda the vehicle of Lord Vishnu.

Palliyoda seva sangam

Palliyoda Seva Sangam is a membership based organisation with two members from each of the 52 villages that own a *Palliyodam* (snake boat). The PPS are responsible for the annual snake boat race that take place on the day of the Uthritathi star in Chingam month (usually between 15 August and 20 September). They have set up a museum in Aranmula to showcase models of boats, trophies won, photographs of famous gusts. The traditional songs (*Vanchipattu*) that are sung by the oarsmen have been recorded at the Museum. This boat festival-Aranmula Uthritathi boat race has grown into great international event in India.

Vilakkumadom

Vilakkumadom is located in Edayaranmula two kilometres from Aranmula where Krishna arrived travelling through the Pampa River by a small boat made by six bamboos; from here he went to the current temple location at Aaranmula. Aranmula 'Kodiettu' and 'Pushpabhishekam' which constitute the holy procession of the idol of Krishna starts from the Vilakkumadom during festivals and ends at the Aarattukadavu' located on the banks of river Pampa near the temple.

Aranmula Valla Sadhya

Aranmula is also famous for the speciality of *Vallasadhya* festival, an elaborate vegetarian meal with as many as forty two dishes. This is a highly scientific course with each item required to be taken in a sequence. The rich biodiversity of the region reflects on the food regime and the placing of the items in continuation has inbuilt wisdom of native Ayurveda in it. Another festival that is celebrated here is the 'Khandavanadahanam' during the month of Dhanus Where a replica of a forest is made and then lit up, which is symbolic, is to the forest fire of Mahabharata.

The 'Kappam' festival in the Malayalam month of Dhanu were children and youth go to each houses and collect the areca nut palm leaf *thanunguperukku*, later burning it tied to a palm tree.

This is in remembrance of *Khandava Dahanam* as believed. Fasting on *Thiruvonam* (national festival of Kerala) related to Aranmula Temple is a special custom followed in the Aranmula village. The heads of three Brahmin households in Aranmula and nearby Nedumprayar follow a tradition of fasting on *Thiruvonam* as atonement for a sin. The tradition reportedly dates back to more than two centuries. The festivals of Aranmula village showcase several ritual art forms unique to the region. This includes *Padayani*, *Velakali*, and *Myoora Nirtham*, *Kurathi Aattam*, *Arjuna Nirtham* and a host of musical instruments. These remain in Aranmula even when it vanished at many other places. The performances are primarily devoted to the lord.

The rituals are sakteya and the traditional priesthood belongs to Dalit, communities. With many temples and places of worship around Aranmula is a major Hindu pilgrimage spot. Given the large Christian population, Christmas and Easter are also celebrated with a lot of fun and gaiety.

Sabarimala Pilgrim Centre

Sabarimala

The Sabarimala is the famous pilgrimage tourism centre is situated eighty five kilometres from Aranmula. Which temple is open for five day every month and then for seventy two days from November to January. Pilgrims from all over India are to be found visiting this famous temple with no bar on caste, creed, colour, or religion. The biggest festival the Aranmula region is of course when Sabarimala is open for seventy two days. Aranmula temple is an idathavallom for the devotees of sabarimala.

CONCLUSION

Aranmula, one of the most renowned temple villages in Kerala state, a cradle of Kerala's culture, a place where the memories of our forefathers repose, this heritage village has been facing a serious challenge over their lives and land. On a massive scale large tracts of farmland and wildlife habitats are being handed over to corporate evils for mining, building airports; a failed model of development is being imposed at breakneck speed, based on mining extraction and airport project badly affect the families living in the proposed area.

Reference

1. Government of Kerala, District Hand Book of Pathanamthitta (M), Thiruvananthapuram, Department of Public Relations, 2003, p.34.
2. AranmulaPanchayat, Vikasanarekha 2010-2012(M), Aranmula, 2012, p.9.
3. Government of India, Census Report 2011, New Delhi: Directorate of Census, 2012, p.85.
4. <http://www.aranmula.com.in>
5. <http://www.explorerruralindia.org/aranmula>.
6. <http://www.isgkera.gov.in>
7. <http://www.keralagov.in/pathanamthitta>.
8. Heritage Village Action Council, *NunakalkondoruVimanathavalam*, (M), Aranmula, Heritage Village Action Council, 2014, pp.21-24.
9. *Ibid.*, p.6.
10. (<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/1976-+Silent+valley+movement:+The+genesis+of+green/1/76360.html>)
11. <http://samvada.org/2014/news/big-victory-for-aranmula-agitation-green-tribunal-cancels-environment-clearance-to-aranmula-airport/>
12. <http://www.newsbharati.com/Encyc/2013/3/9/The-Aranmula-agitation-the-battle-to-preserve-the-cultural-silent-valley-of-the-south.aspx#.VBsd1vmSxvA>
13. V.S. Vijayan, The proposed Aranmula Greenfield Airport: its Potential Ecological, Social and Economic Impacts-A Preliminary Appraisal, ThrichurSimali Foundation, 2013.pp1-15.
14. Heritage Village Action Council, "Nunakal Kondoru Vimana Thavalam" (M), Aranmula, Heritage Village Action Council, 2014, p.9.
15. *ibid.*, pp.10.
16. *ibid.*, pp.11-12
17. Cherukara Sunny Lucose, "Niyama Virudha Anumathikalk kupinnil Van Azhimathi" (M), *Keralasabdam*, January 22, 2012, p.30.
18. *ibid.*, p.31
19. <http://www.downtoearth.org.in>.
