

History, Culture and Economical Aspects of Lakshadweep

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Abstract: *Lakshadweep comprises of group of islands lying between 8 degree and 12 degree North latitude, and between 71 degree and 74 degree East longitude. It is located at a distance ranging from 280 km to 450 km away from the mainland of India. There are total 27 islands, 3 reefs and 6 submerged sandbanks. Only 11 islands are inhabited with very low ground elevation of few meters above Sea Level. Total geographical area of the territory is 32 sq.km. All the land is classified as agricultural land and the land used area is 28.5sq.km. The lagoons cover 4200sq. km. with 20,000sq.km. of territorial waters and about 0.4 million sq.km. of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Length of Coastline of Lakshadweep is 132 km. Lakshadweep also has an intriguing history to narrate. Like the rest of India, Lakshadweep too had to put up monarchical dominance and colonial rule in the past. Historical records confirm that the island was hometo the Cheras before the Pallavas annexed it in the 7th century. By the 14th century, Lakshadweep fell into the hands of Muslims. The muslim rulers not only governed the place but also left a lasting impression on the culture of the land. Although Lakshadweep came under the dominance of diverse rulers, very few empires managed to influence the land as much as the Muslim traders did. The supremacy of the Arakkal family continued even after the invasion of the Portuguese and the Dutch rulers in 17th century. Once the British East India Company completely took over the region in 18th century, the Arakkal clan was forced to cede its power to the colonial rulers. The culture of the Lakshadweep group is quite rich. There are many types of practices and traditions here. Life and Culture of Lakshadweep island are highly Influenced by the Culture of Mappile Community in the North Malabar in Kerala, Perhaps due to the Historical Contracts through navigation, Commerce and political dominance. Coconut farming and fishing was the main occupation. Exporting copra and dried fishes were the main sources of income. This article is revealed that History, Culture and Economical Aspects of Lakshadweep.*

Keywords: Lakshadweep, Coral atolls, Jassari, Exclusive Economic Zone, Ullakamutu, Parichakkali

1. Introduction

Lakshadweep is a group of small separate islands surrounded by deep sea situated in Arabian sea away at 200-400 kms. In the western coast of Malabar, Kerala. The history of Lakshadweep starts from the memories of various travellers such as Marco polo, Ibnu Bathutha and was an important land for even the famous sailor Vasco Da Gama. The Lakshadweep islanders are believed to have discovered by shipwrecked sailors during the reign of Cheramanperumal, the legendary king of Kerala in the 4th century AD. Towards the later 18th century all the Lakshadweep islands were under the control of Arakkal Beevi of Cannanor (Kannur). Before moving into the hands of British after defeating the oppressive ruler of Arakkal. After defeating Tipu Sulthan the islands came under the rule of British. At the time of independence from British the Amindivi group islands were under Collector of south canara and the other islands were under the collector of Malabar both under the Madras presidency. This position was continued till 1956 when along with the recognition of Kerala state, the two groups of islands merged as single Union Territory as Laccadives, Minicoy and Amindivi Islands. It was renamed as Lakshadweep in November 1973. The headquarter of Lakshadweep shifted from Kozhikode to Kavaratti in March 1964. The islands now constitute one district for administrator is head of Union Territory. Each is one village (Dweep) Panchayaths with elected members and Lakshadweep has one district panchayath with elected members. Lakshadweep is highly influenced by Islamic culture also the music and dance of the people of this island can be seen to be highly influenced by Islamic culture. The majority of the people of islands depend on coconut and fishing for occupation. The traditional industry revolves

around tuna fishing, dry fish, coir, vinegar, jaggery, kidu making and copra making. Although the boat building industry has suffered, the traditional boat building skills still exist. A tuna canning factory is functioning at Minicoy island. Coir fibre factory and coir production centres are also functioning in all the islands.

Objectives

- 1) To know about the history of Lakshadweep
- 2) To understand about the Cultural aspects of Lakshadweep
- 3) To examine the Economic peculiarities of Lakshadweep

2. Methodology

Data and information presented in article are collected from various articles, books and Magazine related to Lakshadweep.

History of Lakshadweep

Origin of the human settlements in Lakshadweep is not very clear. A popular belief is that king Cheramanperumal of Kerala disappeared from his kingdom. So search parties were sent to locate him. One crew of Raja of Cannore was caught in a storm and landed on Bengaram island. When they returned home they gave information about Lakshadweep islanders. So another party set sail and reached Amini Island. They failed to trace the lost king but in turn discovered these islands.

Between 6th and 9th century these islanders were frequented by Arab merchants and travellers as they are conveniently located on the trade routes between African and Asian continents. It is believed that Saint Ubaidullah landed in

Amini Island in 7th century and propagated Islam in this archipelago.

People from India also visited these islands to collect cowries and conch shells over the centuries. The King from Chera, Chola and Pandiya Dynasties had claimed this territory to be under their region. Chera king Peruchottuthiyam is believed to have invaded these islands to control tortoise shell trade.

Raja of the Chola Dynasty had also visited these islands. However when larger kingdoms came to an end in ancient India they were usually taken over by the Vice-Roy's. Thus by 10th century the Kolathiris has North Malabar and Lakshadweep under their jurisdiction. Their naval chief was from a Muslim family of Arrakal in Cannore who also protected their trade. This family had good trade relations with Arabs. This enterprising family gave impetus to coir making in Lakshadweep and slowly established themselves on these islands.

In the 16th century the Portuguese tried to gain the control of these islands. Vaccoda Gama is said to have these islands in route one of his missions. The Portuguese even built a fort in Amini Island but were chased out by the locals.

Over the period the Arakkal rule became unbearable. Some islanders sought help of Tip Sultan who succeeded in acquiring Aminidivi group of islands (Amini, Kadmat, Kiltan, Chetlat and Bitra). In 1801 all his land was taken over by East India Company. Yet Arakkal Bibi continued to administer other islands till her death in storm in 1847. Later some islanders went to Cannore to meet the king. Raja of Cannore decided to help the inhabitants of Lakshadweep, who were struck by a natural calamity. Sir W. Robinson accompanied the Raja and surveyed the islands. Sir Robinson then offered East India Company's help in the form of loan to the Raja which continued for a few years. Later, when the amount of loan increased and the Raja could not repay it, the Aminidivi islands fell in the hands of East India Company in 1854. The British appointed an administrator for each island in place of the earlier Karyakars. After a few more years in 1921 the remaining islands came under the British jurisdiction. After India's independence, all the islands of Lakshadweep archipelago were grouped under the Union Territory on 1st November 1956.

3. Cultural aspects of Lakshadweep

Language

Language of the islanders except Minicoy is without script, named 'jasari'. According to history it is derived from Dravidal language and a mixture of Tamil, Malayalam, Arabic and Hindi. The speaking language shows some local difference from islanders to island and this is due to prolonged isolation and rareness of interaction even between near islands and mainland. This remained the local language unchanged and non developed Minicoy islanders speaking Maldivian which is the language of their nearby island Maladive. It is written in Divehi script which has 24 alphabets and written from left to right.

Food Habits

The staple diet of the islanders is rice and fish. Coconut and jiggery is generously used in the cuisine. Some of the dishes are called Kanji, Rabechor, Tangachor, Korichor, Kalangi, Arikpetri, Chakrachor, Uppam, Kumi-Upam all of which have rice as the main ingredient.

Dress

The men wear a white or colored lungi which is a rectangular piece of cloth. The women wear a silver thread round the waist. Elderly persons draw the tips of the lungi. But on special occasions a fine piece of embroidered cotton or silk cloth is put round the shoulders. The head dress of the women is the thattan which is put round the shoulders. The head dress of the women is the thattan which is along scarf for covering the head and shoulder. Saris are traditional dress among the educated class, otherwise women prefer wearing pardas.

Houses

In Lakshadweep, a house generally consists of veranda, a common room behind it, two or three bedrooms, according to the size of the family, a room for storing coconuts and a kitchen. In the verandas and in the common room, there will be on either side platforms on which one can sleep. Temporary sheds are erected at the back where women from neighbourhood assemble for grinding the coconuts. New room is usually set up once a girl gets married, since she and her spouse is supposed to live in this house.

Local Customs

Every society has its peculiar customs. Berrudukkal and Chorukodukkal are specifically practiced in the Amini group of islands and in Kavaratti respectively wherein a needy family arranges a feast to which the guests contribute in cash or kind such as rice, hens, goats, cow's etc. The host returns the gesture whenever he can on similar occasion. Various other customs are followed in Lakshadweep right after the birth of a child. On the 40th day after the birth of a child, Mudikalayal means shaving of head is performed. Later when the boys are between 6 and 12 years, Markakalyanam popular custom circumcision is celebrated.

After a marriage is agreed upon Kanoth (Nikah) Ariyal is organized a few months before the wedding when the date of the marriage and other details are fixed. Then three days before the wedding Arrikuttikal is performed when members of the household personally visit and invite the guests. Mehr is the bridal price paid by the groom to the bride. It is decided between the parties before the alliance is agreed upon and is paid in cash on day of Nikkah. The amount varies from island to island and depends on the economic portion of the family. The minimum is fixed at Rs 31. Mehr amount once paid is never taken back. A person who has not paid the mehr can't demand of a divorce. In such cases the Khasi orders it to be paid before he grants the divorce.

Marumakkathayem law

In Lakshadweep succession of personal property is also governed by Marumakkathayem law unless it is specifically laid down in the will of the descended that it should go to this wife and children. Self acquired property can however be disposed of in any manner one likes under

the muslin law followed in the islanders, the sons eligible for two shares in the property, while the daughter gets only one share.

Religion

The religion is most important for in Lakshadweep. Major population of Muslims in Lakshadweep

Caste

The caste system is highly prevalent in Androth, Amini and Kavaratti Island. The following are the major divisions of caste system present in Androth.

Koya->Karvanans

Malmi->Sailors

Malacheri->Labour

Festivals

The most important festivals celebrated in the Union territory are Id-ul-Fitr, Id-Uz-Zuha or Bakrid, Milad-UN-Nabi, Shab-e -Barat and Muharram.

Id-UI-Fitr. Locally known as Cheriyaaperunal marks the culmination of the Ramzanfast. It falls on the first of the month of Shawwal when thanks giving prayers are offered in important mosques for the successful completion of the fasts of the previous Ramzan. It is a day of feasting. In some island community feasting is also prevalent. In Kavaratti, for Example a big feast is arranged at the mohillin mosque with contribution made by the people in the form of offerings of goats, cows, rice etc. Mouloud (prayer) In the name of the prophet is conducted at the mosque on the day. Special Rathibs are conducted at the Ujira and Mohidden Mosques women and children adorned in their best clothes attend the Rathibs. In some island (Kadmat for example) women participate in the performance of the rathib. Id-UI-Zuhra or Valiyaperunal (Bakrid) falls on the 10th day of the DulHaj to Commemorate the occasion when the prophet Ibrahim Submitted himself to the will of God. Men attend the morning prayers in mosques and cows and goats are sacrificed in God's name and distributed. Special Rathibs are performed to make the Valiyaperun

Milad-Un-Nabi, The birth of the prophet Mohammed falls on the twelfth day of Rabi-Ui-Awwal. Alms are distributed on this day and people gather at the mosque to listen to discourses on the prophet's life. Shab-e Barat is celebrated on the night of the fourteenth day of Shaban when special prayers are offered for the peace of the souls of one's deceased kin and sweets are distributed. Muharram it is an occasion for mourning rather than an occasion for festivity, name commemorate the tragedy of Karbala which witnessed the martyrdom of Iman Hussain (the grandson of prophet Mohammed) and his companions. On the day evening sweets are distributed in the mosques.

Birth

When child is born "Azaan" and "Iqamath" whispered to the ears. It is their custom that the father's side should give a treat in celebrating the child birth. It is during the seventh day the child gets a haircut and naming of the child will be done thereafter. As part of the celebration, the parents usually make an offering of oil or anything else to the nearest mosque.

Death

As followed in the Islamic culture the dead are buried. In Lakshadweep, prayer offerings for the dead is a compulsory practice, it will be done for four times after death on 3rd day, 7th day, 40th day and after one year.

Folk Dances and Song

The loneliness, isolation and monotony of these coral atolls are often broken by the folk-dances and songs. These dances and songs many are broadly categorized as follows.

1) Kolkali (Dance with Sticks)

This is the most important popular folk dance of these islands only males however, participate in it. They form pairs and dance in a circle, as per the synchronous beating of the sticks they hold. The dance is accompanied by rhythmic folk-songs.

2) Parichakkali (Dance with Sword and shield)

This is a slight variation of Kolkali. The dancers use the wooden sword and shield instead of sticks, as in kolkali. It is said that this is a martial art and some formations reiterate dual combats of ancient warriors. This begins slowly and steadily but culminates to a crescendo of agile physical movement.

3) Ulakkamuttu (Dance with an Exercise)

It is more an exercise than a dance. Two persons sit on the floor with two long and sturdy poles which they beat horizontally to the rhythm of a song. To this rhythm two or more persons dance in between the poles. It is mostly performed in Agatti Island.

4) Duff and Drum Dance

This is a special type of dances which is performed near mosque on some special occasions. A group of persons all males participate in it. Duffs and drums are beaten in a rhythmic tune over which some males persons dance.

5) Lava, Bandiya and Dandi Dances

The Lava dance is the traditional folk dance of the people of Minicoy. The Lava dancers flash colourful costumes along with a marvellous performance of their art. Lava dance is most popular among the dances of the Minicoy. Other specialized dance of the Minicoy Island are Dandi dance and Bandiya Dance. Lava Art enthusiasts revived this from public memory mainly from old artists. Mainly old men of the Raaverian Community perform the lava with brisk, vigorous and rhythmic steps and colourful combine with the traditional duns to make the personality of the Lava dance unique. Bandiyaa group of young women dance to the tune of lava carrying a Bandiya which has great relevance in the social set up of this island. As per traditional custom the young women bring drinking water in these Bandiyas to the houses of their bridegrooms and their close relations. This custom still prevails in Minicoy Island.

6) Folk songs

The folk songs of the Islanders are-"Kaatuveeshipattu", "Athaalambipattu", "Maulambipattu (Mailanchipattu)", Oppana Pttu, Doli Pttu "Karudipattu", Baith and Kappapattu" most of the folk songs and folk dances are sung

in praise of God. Athaalambilipattu is sung in the midnight of Ramzaan to wake up the people to dine and pray. Maulambipattu {Mailanchipattu} Oppanapattu,'DoliPattu' etc. are sung on the occasion of marriage. "Baith" is the Hymn used in Diker and Duff muttu."Kavadipattu' is sung when the people go for collecting shells.

Economic peculiarities of the islanders

Fishing and Copra Making

Lakshadweep comprises the only Coral atolls of the country. With a Vast lagoon of 4,200km² (1,600sqmi) it has territorial waters of 20,000km² (7,700 sq mi) Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of (400,00km²) (150,000sqmi) and Coastal line of about 132 kilometres (82m). There is an estimation of about one lakh tonnes (100,000 tonnes (110,000 tons) of tuna and tuna like fishes and about an equal quantity of shark in the sea around Lakshadweep fishing is the main livelihood of islanders or else it is coconut fire.freshly caught tuna is processed by drying it in the sun after cooking and smoking. The resultant product, known as 'mas'are popular products exported from the islanders to south east Asian Countries these islanders.

After the fish product income next to the main sources of income of the islands have always been the coconut and its allied items like Coir making, Copara, Jaggeryetc.A sizeable portion of the Coconut is consumed at home and what little surplus they may have is exported which fetches them very little income, especially after meeting the expense on transport. But recently there has been increase in the price of nuts and its allied items and the improvements in the method of cultivation (Specially the hybrid plants).Coconut thus has come to stay as the deciding factor in the island economy While the men folk remain occupied in fishing the children, women and old men remain busy in collecting coconuts making, Coirropes, mats, Jaggery etc which fetch them good income However this situationdifferent MinicoyIsland from the northern Islands.At Minicoy the able bodied men, firstlyjoin the foreign shipping Corporation, as they are good Sailors, then Secondary those men left at home go for fishing. Thewomenfolk at Minicoy look after the Mas(fish) processing.While it is done exclusively by the men folk in northern island coconut the only CommerccialCrops in Lakshadweep has Occupied an important place these days as it is Cultivated even in uninhabited Islands.

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