

Summary of the Project Report

Aranmula is a village in the Pathanamthitta district of the state of Kerala, about 100km south east to Kochi, near Kozhenchery town on the banks of the holy river Pampa and is located at 9.33°N 76.68°E . Edasserimala, Kidanganoor, Edayarammula, Malakkara, Arattupuzha, Neervilakom, Erumakkadu, Vallana, Kurichimuttom and Kotta are the 10 *Karas* which belong to the Aranmula Panchayat. This holy land used to be the centre of pilgrimage from time immemorial and a trade post of eminence, when river was the chief means of transport.

The earliest literary reference to Aranmula is found in *Thiruvaymoli*, the Vaishnavite devotional work of Nammalvar, the great Vaishnava saint of the 9th century A. D. It refers to the temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu of Aranmula¹. The Kilimanur record of 1168 A. D also refers to Aranmula, in which a brahmana by name Satti Vikkiranman- Satti of Kamuganjeri from Aranmula is referred². Aranmula was one among the 32 brahmin settlements in Kerala³ and is famous as temple city, which is situated 10 miles east of Thiruvalla. In medieval documents Aranmula is mentioned as *Aranvilai* or *Thiruvaranvilai*⁴. *Tirunizhalmala*, a 13th century Tamil mixed literary work written by a native poet of Ayirur in Aranmula by name Govindan sheds a detailed description of the social and cultural history of Aranmula. It also provides the

¹ Nammalvar, *Tiruvaymozhi*, VII, 10

Also Quoted in Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahmin Settlements in Kerala*, 2013 (1978) Thrissur, p.53

² TAS Series Volume 5 Part I, II & III PP 70 – 71 (The village of Kilimanur with the forests, arable lands and compound sites included in it was granted by Sri Vira Adichchavarman Tiruvadi who was the ruler of Venadu, for the expenses connected with the feeding of Brahmins or with the annual temple festivities and ten individuals were elected for the management of the temple affairs from among those who were already attached to other important temples.) One of these 10 individuals is Satti Vikkiranman

³ Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahmin Settlements in Kerala*, 2013 (1978) Thrissur, p.53

⁴ *Loc. Cit.*

information about the 10 *cheris/karas* (land division) that existed in Aranmula. Among the ten, six are *Puram cheris* and four are *Akam cheris*. The *Puram cheris* include Kozhumancheri, Keezhuvay, Meluvay, Melullorpavenam, Cherukol, and Ayirur. The *Akam cheris* are Thottuppuzhasseri, Mallappallicheri, Edacheri, and Nidampuraiyar (see Appendix-I). The later works like *Aranmula Vilasam Hamsappattu* of Nedumpayil Kochukrishnanasan- a native of Cherukol, written during the last phases of 18th century A. D.⁵ and *Aranmula Vilasam Maniavalam* of Villwattath Raghavan Nambiar (Manuscript) of the 19th century A. D. also throws light upon the present study. The former gives a detailed account of the temple of Aranmula and the latter provides information about the temple and *Uthrittathi vallamkali* of Aranmula. *Thiruvarammula Kshetramahatmyam* of Bhaskara Marar (1966) and the various popular articles written by Unnikrishnan Nair of Thiruvalla also helped the study to a certain extent. The articles found in *Panchajanyam*, Aranmula *Uthrittathi* Boat Festival Souvenir, published by Palliyoda Seva Sangham, Aranmula, *Aranmulayude Charitram* of SreeRanganathan, Sreepadam, Aranmula⁶, the pamphlets, notices, and the special columns in National Daily in different periods at the time of boat race, etc. also provided knowledge on the subject matter. Above all, the field survey and interviews helped delineating history by being other sources of information.

Aranmula is very famous for its ceremonious boat race which is a part of the temple festival here. Another notable event to mention is the *Vallasadya*, a unique mass feast accompanied with strong devotional songs in *Vanchipattu* style at the temple premises. It is offered to the crew of various *Palliyodams* (snake boats). Aranmula is also famous for its metal

⁵ The work is written in 975 of Kollam Era (A.D. 1799) by Nedumpayil Kochu Krishnanasan by observing prayer in the temple premises for curing his ill-health.

⁶ Printed and published by N K Sukumaran Nair as a part of the Awareness Campaign of UNDP aided Endogenous Tourism Project at Aranmula.

mirrors, popularly known as *Aranmula Kannadi*. Recently, the place has also obtained renown for the *Vaasthu Vidya Gurukulam*, which is the traditional centre for constructing buildings. This study has been undertaken to bring into light the traditional and cultural history of the aforesaid place.

Regional peculiarities require special attention as studies of this kind are highly relevant in the sense that regional components play a dominant role in understanding the history of a nation to a large extent. The studies of Romila Thapar on regional history have provided an insight into the historical significance of regions like Punjab and Konkan⁷. According to Romila Thapar, “at the geographical level, the importance of regional history needs no bush. It encourages the search for and often the discovery of new sources ranging from archaeological to archival. This inevitably leads to new questions, which raise the study from information to fresh interpretations. This in turn helps us to redefine the pattern of the region”⁸. Nurul Hasan also emphasizes the importance of the study of regional history for the study of the history of India as a whole⁹. He said, “Ours is a large country with considerable variations in its different regions. At the same time, the existence of major differences notwithstanding there is a remarkable unity in the broad pattern of socio-economic development, culture, and administrative institutions. The understanding of the significant trends of historical change in the country would remain sadly incomplete unless the details are studied at the regional level. In fact, most detailed studies are possible only at that level, such as the working of the administrative machinery, land relations, pattern of agricultural production, organization of trade and handicraft, and position of social classes and groups. These regional studies will be meaningful only if they are undertaken

⁷ Romila Thapar, ‘Regional history: The Punjab’, *Cultural Pasts*, NewDelhi, 2000, pp.95-108.

Idem, ‘Regional history with reference to the Konkan’, *Ibid.* pp.109-122.

⁸ *Ibid.* p.110.

⁹ S Nurul Hasan, *Religion, State, and Society in Medieval India* (collected Essays edited and introduced by Satish Chandra) OUP, 2005, p.37

in the context of the history of the whole country, for only then can the significance of the different features be understood and the distinctiveness appreciated. Even the problems of regional history would arise in the mind of the scholar only as a part of the study of the history of the country as a whole, for the process of social change and the factors motivating it can hardly be observed within the narrow field of a region”¹⁰. To conclude, in historical studies regions have been considered as a fragment of the whole or as a part of macro- history.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 37-38