

A SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS OF KANYAKUMARI (KUMARI KANDAM)

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Abstract

Cape Comorin, also called Kanyakumari, rocky headland on the Indian Ocean in Tamil Nadu state, south-eastern India, forming the southernmost point of the subcontinent. It is the southern tip of the Cardamom Hills, an extension of the Western Ghats range along the west coast of India.

Keywords: KumariKandam, Kumari, Kanyakumari, Cape Comorin, Lemuria, Nanchil Nadu.

Introduction

People are quite familiar with the story of Atlantis, the legendary sunken city as described by Plato, the ancient Greek philosopher. The Indian subcontinent shares a similar tale, though it probably is less well known compared to that of Atlantis. It is the 'lost continent' of Lemuria, frequently connected to the legend of KumariKandam by the Tamil people.

The term Lemuria originated in the latter part of the 19th century due to the presence of lemur fossils in Madagascar and India but not in mainland Africa and the Middle East. Thus, an English geologist Philip Sclater in his 1864 article entitled 'The Mammals of Madagascar' proposed that India and Madagascar were once part of a larger continent, and named this missing landmass 'Lemuria'. The theory was accepted by the scientific community of that period as the explanation of the way lemurs could have migrated from Madagascar to India or *vice versa* in ancient times. With the emergence of the modern concepts of

continental drift and plate tectonics, however, Sclater's proposition of a submerged continent was no longer defensible. Yet, the belief of a lost continent refused to die, and many still believe that Lemuria was an actual continent that existed in the past.

For the people of Tamil, it is considered as the place of evolution of their language rather than just a chronicle. The literary works of the three sangams and Silapadikaram explain the rough topography of Kumari Kandam. There are a few references in Tamil Sangam classics to a landmass that was swallowed up by the sea. The texts of Ramachandra Dikshitar and Devaneyya Paavaanar further torches the details of forty nine 'nadas'; two rivers named 'Paruli' and 'Kumari' and mountains namely 'Kumarikodu' and 'Manimalai'. Nakkeerar in his work 'Iraiyana Agapurul' has quoted the time period of three Tamil sangams held over a period of 9990 years.

The First Tamil Sangam was held at 'Then Madurai' between 9600-5200 BCE that produced literary texts such as Paripadal, Mudhunarai, Mudukurukku, Kalariyaviraian and Peradikaram. The Second Tamil Sangam was said to be held at 'Kapadapuram' and lasted for 3700 years. It was during this time that works such as Tolkaappiyam, Agastya, Boothapuram and Mapuranam were made. The Third Tamil Sangam was held at the present day Madurai in 1850 BCE. Classics such as Thirukkural, Naladiyar, Agananoru and Purananoru were produced during this time. Out of the three Tamil Sangams, the first two were recorded to have been held in the once existed Lemurian continent (Kumari Kandam). When the sea swallowed 'Then Madurai', the capital was shifted to 'Kapadapuram' and the second Tamil Sangam was established. This functioned until a deluge destroyed Kapatapuram. After the deluge, the Pandyas again shifted their capital to the present-day 'Madurai' where the third Tamil Sangam was established.

Some of the important references from Tamil Sangam classics are as follows: 1) in Purananuru 9, verses 10-11 are interpreted as a reference to a Pandya king who ruled a part of the lost land where the river Paruli flowed. 2) in Silapathikaram (Kadu Kaan Kathai) (11:17-22) is a reference to a Pandya king who won over kingdoms in Imayam (the Himalayas) and Gangai (the Ganga) to compensate for his land lost to the deluge. Tamil scholars such as Devaneyya Paavaanar consider the deluge under reference to be the one that destroyed Thenmadurai. 3) According to Adiyarku Nallar,

poem 104:1-4 from Mullai Kalithogai indicates that the Pandya king resettled the survivors of the deluge in certain Chera and Chola territories. Also, the writings of Wishar S Cerve and the maps of W.S.Elliot was brought into Tamil by K. Appadurai, in his book Kumari Kandam Allathu Kadal Konda Thennadu (Kumari Continent or the Submerged Southern Land, 1941). The lost land was committed to writing after the 10th century by commentators like Nakeerar in his commentary on 'Iraiyana Akapporul Urai' and later by other writers like Nachinarkiniyar and Adiyarku Nallar. They portrayed that a series of deluges destroyed the Tamil civilization and the survivors spread out and civilised other parts of the world.

It was during the 20th century there began a clash of the legend with the advent of modern science. The 20th century gave rise to the advent of advanced science and reasoning. Eventually, the advocates of modern science came up with a different notation after understanding the phenomenon of plate tectonics, continental drift and seafloor spreading that dismissed the earlier catastrophic theories. The last Ice Age had a profound influence on the prehistory of humankind. So, in prehistoric studies of coastal areas, it is crucial to understand the consequence of changes in the sea level. About 14,500 years ago, the sea level was lower by 100 metres. With subsequent global warming and melting of large masses of ice, the sea-level started rising in stages.

As the sea level rose, inundation of the exposed continental shelf and low-lying lands in the coastal region occurred. This phenomenon gave rise to the stories and legends of deluges that permeated the African, American and Australian aboriginal folklore and Greek, Roman and Hebrew legends and the Indian puranas, which were referred to as 'pralayas'. Therefore, the coastal areas south of India that were submerged in ancient times evidently gave rise to the Tamil myth of the lost continent of Kumari, while myths of the lost continents of Atlantis and Lemuria were generated in the Western world.

Coring devices have improved that enlarged man's knowledge of the oceans. Seismic methods were also used to study the ocean floor and they have been mapped by ultrasonic signals and echosoundings. Evidence of wide scale former glaciations became overwhelmingly conclusive in the last century. There have been five major glacial advances and five glacial retreats as the globe began to warm during the past two million years. The last of such periods is the present period known as

Holocene/ The last Ice age. It caused the fragmented distribution of Homo-sapiens, and the enormous environmental changes that took place with global warming had a profound influence on the prehistory of humankind. Extensive studies were done to understand global warming during the interglacial periods and sediments were subjected to meticulous analysis to establish the age as well as palaeo-geographical conditions in many parts of the world. This revealed the fact that about 18,000 years ago, during the time of the last Ice Age, ice sheets in the poles spread much wider and the sea level was more than 100 metres lower than it is today, exposing a large area of land along the continental shelf. Siberia was connected to Alaska by land, bridging the people and migration of animals happened over a long period. At this time, the landmass of present-day Australia, Tasmania and Papua New Guinea were joined together. After the last Ice Age, the level of the Indian Ocean, like the rest of the oceans, rose. In the following 8000 years, global warming continued and large masses of ice and glaciers melted, rising sea levels in stages and low-lying lands inundated. The portion of the continental shelf of the south Indian peninsula and the land that connected it to Sri Lanka also went under water as the sea level rose.

Nevertheless, the story of Kumari Kandam is regarded as not just a story, but seems to be laden with nationalistic sentiments. It has been claimed that the Pandiyan kings of Kumari Kandam were the rulers of the whole Indian continent, and that Tamil civilization is the oldest civilization in the world. When Kumari Kandam was submerged, its people spread across the world and founded various civilisations, hence the claim that the lost continent was also the cradle of human civilisation. Few thinkers consider that in the 1920s, with Tamil revivalism and the efforts to counter the Aryan and associated Sanskrit dominance; the concept of Lemuria was wedded to the notion of the lost land referred to in Tamil literature. Probably, the ones who wrote the commentaries exaggerated the extent of land that was submerged by the deluges referred to in Silapathikaram and Kalithogai.

According to the commentators, there were 49 countries (nadas) in the lost land of Kumari Kandam/ Lemuria and the distance between the river Kumari and the river Pahruli that flowed in the lost land was 700 katham, which according to one calculation is about 770 km. Now, Standing in between Science and Historic literary evidence pertaining to language, it is not really easy to conclude the mystery of Lemuria with a postulate. But there certainly arise few questions as an academician.

The crucial question is whether the land referred to as Kumari was as large as a continent? The advocates of Kumari Kandam interpreted the term 'Nadu' to mean country. In Tamil Nadu and Kerala many small towns and villages have 'Nadu' in their names as a term, which basically refer to a settlement, as opposed to 'Kadu' meaning forest. In the above Tamil references there is no mention of the term 'Kandam', referring to a land with the size of a continent.

It is possible that a small area of land (to the extent of a present-day district) was lost by sea erosion and Pahruli and Kumari were rivers of that territory and that the king shifted this capital to places listed above. But in all probability that event would have occurred only in the 5th or 4th century B.C. Such erosions on a limited scale were not unknown to the southern and eastern seaboard of Tamil Nadu. If the fiction is removed from the fact, the entire superstructure called the theory of Kumari Kandam will stand exposed.

Scientifically, it is uncontested that the earliest Homo sapiens developed in Africa 100,000 to 200,000 years ago and migrated to Europe and Asia. Genetic evidence and fossil records of early human beings indicate that they came out of Africa as early as 80,000 to 60,000 years ago. Their descendants migrated to the Far East, probably along the coastal areas adjacent to the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal around the Indian peninsula, Sri Lanka and then north into China and south into Sumatra. As the sea levels rose, resulting in periodic flooding and deluges, prehistoric settlements that were located in the low-lying coastal lands and the exposed continental shelf were inundated. The people who lived in the coastal area of the Indian peninsula and Sri Lanka and who escaped the deluges perpetuated the oral tradition of a lost land that gave rise to the legend of Kumari Kandam.

Conclusion

In spite of the clash of concepts between History and Science, we must admit that "All that is known is History and the Unknown remains Mystery!". Further science oriented historic researches must be encouraged and promoted by the Archaeological departments with sufficient aid by respective Governments in the era of technological advancements to feed the inquiring minds.

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