



ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF RAMESVARAM ISLAND -1

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Tirtha: The prime element

Ramesvaram the holy of the holiest places of the Indian sub continent is having the vital key to understand the cultural directory of the ancient India. The tiny island holds many feature and customs practiced in all these thousands of years by the entire community irrespective of their caste and creed. For perceptive approach and to assimilate various facets of this culture it is essential to probe into the backdrop of the factors that molded this Island as the great bridge of spirituality in all these millenniums. In fact our journey will unearth not only the archaeological remains but the mannerism out of which our culture was warped.

The Matrix

The atomic theory of Science holds good for the philosophy of the origin of the universe. Indian logic also accepts that the world is made of same substance in different chemical combinations and distinguishes five basic rudimentary elements as base for all substances of different quality. Vedas indicate that life and substances were originated in water which the Geologists name as Glacier period. Vedas proclaims that the origin of the world is water. “Apo va Idagum sarvam” world is the product of water. In fact almost all Indian thoughts could logically state that the five rudimentary elements namely, Earth (Prithivi), Water (Appu), Air (vayu), Fire (Agni) and Akasa (Ether) from various living and unliving things in the world.

Among them the first three earth, water and fire could be seen individually and air can be felt. Ether, the all pervasive element is not visible and hence many schools of thought refuse to accept it as an element. Among them the Buddhism is very critical and accepts only four rudimentary elements. Nevertheless, various permutations and combinations form the universe and even the Atma or souls are not exempted from this model.

In Tamil Nadu this tradition is found to be deep rooted as we have five shrines dedicated to all these five elements .Shrine embodying Earth is the lingam in Kanchipuram and water is in the form of lingam of Jambukesvara in Thiruvanaikoil. Fire is attributed to the shrine in Thiruvannamalai and air is represented in Kalhasti. The all pervasive ether or Akasa is the shrine in Chidambaram.



The physical presence of the first three elements earth, water and air could be seen in all living beings and fire is felt by the presence of Chaitanya or life in all beings. Ether the non visible element is the bearer of all these four elements. In fact the modern science almost accepts this prospect of the thoughts of Indians. It is because of this element only the modern communication system developed.

However, for the purpose of our journey it is necessary to understand the nature of these elements. Earth might not represent mere base element but indicate the geo physical position of the place. It is the basic principle that the magnetic meridian and position of the place in earth play a vital role in dispensing significance to the location. Water as mentioned earlier, is the prime element in the origin of the life and air vibrates life or movement in the universe.

Fire represents not only the fire that we perceive with our eyes but the heat that generates energy in the world. However the nature of water and fire are almost seemingly opposed to each other. While the latter is considered as destroyer the former is considered as the creator or sustainer. Ancient Indians believed that water in the form of massive flood can provide relief to all the sufferings of the living- being especially for mankind.

It is evident from the above that Thirtha or water played an important role and the sanctity of the place is decided on Kshetra, Murti and Thirtha. While Kshetra represent earth, Murti is the physical variation of the former. Thirtha or water is the principle element that provides the considerable status to the Kshetra and in that Ramesvaram got an unparallel position in the world. To understand the implication let us seek the help of Vedas and Puranas and consider the history of some great personalities like Parasurama...



To be continued...

