Discussion & Conclusion

Archaeological and historical evidence indicates that towns and villages in Early Historic India were the focal-points of a very active trading environment. Any site could participate in trade through the production of some kind of tradable surplus, such as agricultural produce, raw materials, or finished products. At the same time, these towns and villages were stopping-points along the routes of travel for pilgrims, traders, and political figures. The recent surveys carried out at Arikamedu enable us to assess the extent to which local exchange was a significant component of economic activity. For Arikamedu, the earliest period of its history – from around the third century BC to the second century AD- is the most eventful and important. According to these recent surveys it is inferred that prior to the advent of the Roman trade, Arikamedu was one among the scores of Megalithic or Iron Age settlements in South India. These settlements are characterized by the use of iron tools and implements, different types of pottery and elaborate stone burials. But one should remember that unlike most other Megalithic sites, clear evidences for Megalithic graves, so far, not been discovered at Arikamedu.

Many of the Megalithic settlements including Arikamedu were located close to rivers that enabled transport and communication, through
boats, with other sites in the region. Indeed, it is further inferred that some of these settlements were deliberately located along local trade routes. In some places, the Megalithic culture continued even after the commencement of the Rome-India trade. This is proved by the discovery of Roman coins buried, along with various household goods, within Megalithic graves in the Coimbatore region of Tamil Nadu.

The region around Arikamedu abounds in Megalithic sites such as Sengamedu, Parikal, Tiruvakarai and Suttukeni. At Suttukeny (a nearest rich Megalithic site) a four-held gold spacers were recovered. A similar type of object was also found during V. Begley’s excavation (in 1992) in Arikamedu at early level (Fig. 92). There is adequate archaeological evidence to show that Arikamedu had trade and cultural links with many Megalithic and Early Historic settlements in the region. Thus, Arikamedu’s position as a prominent trade centre appears to have been established even prior to the commencement of the Rome-India trade. The Romans chose this place as their trading station on account of its strategic location close to the sea and the firm links that it had with the hinterland.

During the period of Roman trade, Arikamedu was, again, one among several Coromandel coast trading ports frequented by the Roman traders.
Suttukeni


Fig. 92: (a). Gold Necklace strand separator from Suttukeni (b). Similar Gold strand separator from Arikamedu
Such ports include Vasavasamudram, Karaikadu, Kaveripattinam, Alagamkulam and Korkai. Arikamedu was the largest and most important among all these ports. Here, besides Roman’s Rouletted wares, there are limited/inferior/ locally made rouletted potteries are also reported from interior sites of Arikamedu which are contemporary to Roman phase. With in Tamil Nadu there are atleast 60 sites revealing this pottery tradition, reported both from excavations and surface collections. While considering the remarks of Begley who mentions that “Rouletted pottery occurs only in urban or religious centres” the occurrence of the inland Rouletted Ware sites deserves an explanation. Besides its connections with hinterland sites such as Kottaimedu on the banks of the river Pambai, Manikolai, Tirusopuram (for their beads manufacturing and selling) and other recently discovered sites in the study region, Arikamedu also occasionally interacted with some of the other ports such as Vasuvasamudram, Karaikadu and Kaveripattinam.

Regarding the source of raw material for lapidary work at Arikamedu they must have come from the interior sites traveling perhaps on the same routes as ceramic fine wares, through the Krishna and Godavari doab. The beds of these two rivers also yielded jasper, agates, and possibly even prase (Francis 2002: 116-118). Ingredients for the glassmakers of Arikamedu also
came from the doab as this region was under-populated and underdeveloped at this time and within the area Leshnik (1974: 19-20) called the ‘Tribal Belt’. Further, the raw materials were moved to the two sites of Arikamedu and Kodumanal (rich megalithic site from Erode district). From Arikamedu, these raw materials must have reached to satellite sites like Manikolai and Thirusopuram where the recent survey exposed humpty numbers of glass beads besides conical jar fragments.

In the present area Rajan has identified many megalithic habitation sites with engraved Jain caves in the South Arcot region (see Fig. 57), which will ultimately help us to identify of ancient trade routes. For, example the strategic location of Tirukoyilur and landmark inscription of Athiyaman (ruler of Tagadur, modern Dharmapuri region) at Jambai (in Villupuram district) are suggestive of well-organized trade network extending from Marandahalli (Kolar region), Uttangarai, Chengam, Thirukoyilur, Jambailinking Sengamedu with Arikamedu (Fig. 93). A recent resurvey conducted by the present author on Sengamedu, near Vridhachalam taluk of Villupuram district, helped that the site Sengamedu shared lot with Arikamedu and most probably acted as small riverine port to Arikamedu.
Particularly those massive structures found at Sengamedu seem to be like area warehouse at Arikamedu.

The above study may thus conclude that both prior to and during the period of Roman trade, south eastern India had a large trading network of coastal and inland ports and market centres that were intimately linked with Arikamedu. During the height of the Roman trade, the smaller hinterland centres provided the goods and services including agricultural products needed by the large and busy urban settlement of Arikamedu. Thus, these smaller sites emerged as satellite centres around Arikamedu. Following these latest researches on Arikamedu, debate has now started among these schools over the inland transshipment of commodities that reached Arikamedu for export purpose, and the imported commodities of Arikamedu that distributed to the inland urban centres. Paradoxically, it has been concluded that the imported goods were fully consumed by the Arikamedu settlers and all the exported goods were produced from Arikamedu and surrounding area. Generally the size of these sites ranges from 5-50 acres, and show some sort of hierarchy between them. And presence of more sites in Pambai valley also suggests that inland
transshipment was not only carried along the river Gingee but it was also in the banks of Pambai beyond Suttukeni and Tiruvakkai.

So the present research work on satellite settlements of Arikamedu urge us the necessity of the identification of strategic location of Arikamedu in the context of Megalithic exchange system and their interaction with the other early historical sites including North India. The identification can be possible only by further extensive exploration/excavation in and around Arikamedu including (old) South Arcot region of Tamil Nadu.

It is only in the context of these that the dynamics of growth and expansion of satellite settlements of Arikamedu can be comprehended.