

CHAPTER -V

CONCLUSION

In this research work, a sincere and serious effort has been taken to make an indepth study about the society and culture in Rameshwaram. Rameshwaram, a celebrated pilgrim centre of all India importance, is an Island in the Palk Straight at the south eastern coast, Ramanathapuram District, Tamil Nadu in southern India. This place is famous for the ancient temple Siva, named here as *Ramesvara* or *Ramanatha*, because it is believed to have been consecrated by Rama, the incarnation of Vishnu, the Lord of protection in the Hindu trinity and the hero of the Epic Ramayana.

It is one of the four *Dhams* and also one of the twelve *Jyothir Lingas* in India. The three most revered *Nayanmars* (Saivite saints) Thirunavukkarasar, Sundarar and Thirugnanasambandar have glorified Ramanathaswamy with their songs.

Rameshwaram is regarded as a place of special sacra-sanctity by the Hindus. It is in fact, believed that every particle of sand in the Island represents the, *Linga* of Siva and it is prohibited to plough or extract oil or make pottery on the Island. It is said in the scriptures that, a pilgrimage to Varanasi to pay homage to Lord Visvanatha is incomplete without also paying homage to Lord Ramanatha at Rameshwaram.

Pilgrims, who bath in the sea at Rameshwaram, take away pots of sea water to pour into the Ganges and conversely pilgrims take pots of Ganges water to Rameshwaram so that it can be poured over his *Linga*.

According to Hindu *Sastras* only on particular occasion's people could bath in the sea, but their general rule has an exception in the case Rameshwaram. While the bath in other seas propitiates the spirits of the deceased, Rameshwaram alone is recommended for the prosperity of the living ones.

According to Epic Ramayana, Rama killed Ravana and to expiate the sin, he had to install and worship a Siva *Linga*. It was at Rameshwaram, that this worship took place and so this place got the name (*Rama-Eswaran*) Rameshwaram.

Padma Purana, Naradiya Purana, Kurma Purana, Skanda Purana, Sivapurana and other *puranas* describe the legendary origin of the place and the mythological background of the iconographical forms.

Apart from legends and *puranas*, recorded history also gave a picture of Rameshwaram. The works of Appar and Thirugnanasambandar, which belonged to seventh century A. D, speak about Rameshwaram.

Rulers like Cholas, Hoysala, Later Pandiyas, Vijayanagar, Nayaks of Madurai and Tanjore and the Sethupathis of Ramanathapuram had a close connection with Rameshwaram.

Munificent gifts were granted by the above said rulers to this temple. Sethupathis of Ramanathapuram, who were known as the guardian of Sethu, propagate the name and fame of this temple by their grants.

The majority of the people in Rameshwaram are Hindus, following Christians and Muslims, Sikhs in small number. Recent discoveries proved that Buddhism also had a strong hold in Rameshwaram but now few people are found in this place. The caste system was the basis of society of Rameshwaram. It consists of a number of castes like Brahmin, Maravas, Kallars, Agamudiyar, Vellalar and other castes. It is maintained that the people live in harmony.

Marriage ritual is performed on the basis of the caste system. Marriage takes place among the members of a particular caste. Inter-caste marriages are held now and then. There is no discrimination regarding their occupation, food, dress and ornaments. But marriage and funeral ceremonies differ from one religion to another. Rituals, rites and ceremonies are types of social actions used in societies to impress the significance of particular occasions, events, persons or conditions upon all or some part of their members. Several social customs and conventions are common to all the communities.

Hindu festivals like *Deepavali*, *Pongal* and *Ganesh Chaturthi*, Christian festivals like Christmas, New Year and Good Friday and Muslim festivals like *Ramzan* and *Bakrid* are celebrated by Hindus, Christians and Muslims respectively. People of each religion celebrate their festival by inviting people of other religions as guests. All these festivals highlight the unity among the people in this place.

Fishing is the main occupation of the people. But the problems of fishermen are everlasting. They are prevented from fishing facing harassment and arrest by the Sri Lankan Navy. The places of interest in and around Rameshwaram, are Pamban Road Bridge, Pamban Rail Bridge, Olaikuda Beach And Kurusadi Island. Increase in flow of tourist arrival to Rameshwaram leads to growth of tourism industry.

Ramanathaswamy temple that is one of the most venerated one of all Hindu temples lies huddled in palm grove, surrounded by the sea, reflecting divinity in serenity considered as the second most holy place in India. Next to Banaras, it attracts countless pilgrims from all over India. The crowd that gathers in the temple premises represents the whole of India, and one can see here every colour, costume, caste, creed, cult and dialect that represents the variegated admixture of faiths and cultures that India reflects.

The temple was originally a thatched shed under the custody of a hermit. The present structure of the temple was built in the seventeenth century by a number of persons belonging to different generations. The temple is perhaps the finest example of Dravidian architecture, sacred to both *Vaishnavite* and *Saivite*. It has majestic towers and skillfully carved sculptures are among the finest architecture of south India. The pillared corridors of the temple are unique in their beauty. The pillars supporting the corridors are decorated with intricate design and patterns that reveal the exquisite skill of architects of the day. The ancient temple, famous for its long corridor and towering *Gopuras* on the eastern and western sides was

incomplete without two more *Gopuras* on the northern and southern sides. So, two *Gopuras* are being raised at the southern and northern entrances. It is hailed as by a great *Theertha*, and the sage Vyasa advised Dharma Raja to visit this *Punya Theertha* whose holy water as well as the grace of the Lord manifest through them would wash away all their sins.

Though the island town is busy all through the year, October, November, December and January are considered as the Peak season for Ramanathaswamy temple. During this time an average of 15,000 to 16,000 pilgrims visit the temple. The existing basic facilities are highly inadequate to meet the requirements of the huge crowd. There is no mechanism to dispose the cloth being let in the sea by the devotees as per customs and rituals. Most of the hotels and lodges are discharging human waste into the sea. All these lead to the environmental pollution and the spread of diseases in this region.

Suggestions

1. Government may take permanent solution to the long-pending demands of fishermen.
2. Government may take steps to maintain public health and sanitation in Rameshwaram with more care.
3. Government may take steps to introduce more train services to Rameshwaram and reintroduce the same to Dhanuskodi.
4. Archeological Survey of India may take attempts to explore further archeological sources in relation to Rameshwaram.

5. Department of Tourism and Forest Department may take steps to promote beach tourism, eco-tourism and sports tourism in and around Rameshwaram to promote economy of the people of Rameshwaram and provide them more employment opportunities.
6. To promote tourism in Rameshwaram the State and Central Governments may allocate more funds.
7. In addition to pilgrim festival, the government may take steps to organize and popularize cultural festivals in Rameshwaram.
8. Municipal Administration may take steps to develop basic facilities in Rameshwaram.
9. Department of Tourism, Government of Tamil Nadu may provide more incentives to hotel entrepreneurs to start more hotels in Rameshwaram Island and inspect them to fulfill the needs of more tourist arrival.