Chapter 5

ECONOMIC ASPECTS AS REFLECTED IN THE PLACE NAMES

The people who lived in Androth and Kalpeni were aware of the nature of their terrain and the structure of their soil. If there was any doubt regarding these, the authorities had developed ways and means to settle the problem. We have seen that the space in Androth and Kalpeni was identified differently as *kad*, *kunnu*, *thottam*, *pacha*, *avul*, *aar*, *kulam*, *thode*, *sal*, *othi* etc. Sometimes this identity of places may raise some doubts in connection with the ownership and/or occupation of landed property. On such occasions, the elders and authorities settled the problem by digging the soil and clearing the doubt collecting information regarding the structure of the soil. From the experience of life it is known to the islanders that the *kad* and *kunnu* have rock beneath the soil, whereas the *thottam* has a clay known as *olaku*. The *avul* has only mud. It goes without saying that these pieces of information are highly valuable in cultivating the land.

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1 Information collected from Sr. P. P. Sayed Koya, Ex. Amin of Androth.
The sea was part and parcel of human life in the island and it is only natural that the islanders had developed an adequate knowledge about the sea. The area between the sea shore and the boundary of the lagoon is identified as *ali, aar, thodu, sal, bella, parali, par* and *parambu*. The *ali*, which is the biggest, is an opening from the sea to the lagoon. The *aar*, smaller than the *ali* let in fishing boats and in some cases big boats. *Thodu* is still smaller than the *aar*. *Sal* is the smallest channel from the sea to the shore. Commonly the rock formations are absent in these water channels. From these marine toponyms it is clear that the names are borrowed from the mainland where these names are used differently to denote various water resources such as streams, channels, rivulets and so on. *Bella* is a shallow area in the lagoon. These are spots covered with white sand. There are areas where flat rocks are spread out from the islands but some of them contain certain spots without rock. This is called *kalam*. *Parali* is an area of discontinuous and broken rock-formations. *Par* or *para* is nothing but a growth of sea-rock.

The name *parambu* among the marine toponyms is interesting in many ways. In the early poems of the Tamil anthologies *parambu* meant an elevated area rising gradually from the low-lying plains.¹ Later this

¹ Akamamuru, passim.
name was given to the garden lands where the house sites are located. In the toponyms of islands, the *parambu* means sandy areas in the midst of the sea rocks. From these place names which are used to identify various places in the lagoon and the sea board it is clear that the nomenclature was mainly borrowed from the mainland toponyms pertaining to various spaces used for different purposes. This is a clear indication of the influence of a world-view developed by a rural folk whose spatial consciousness was formed by means of their natural environment, when the islanders had felt the necessities.

In Kalpeni the word *kad* is used to denote a land where cultivation was carried out except coconut trees. This name continued to be in use even after that type of land was utilized for cultivation. The outer layer of the soil of *kad* was removed to prepare plots for all kind of cultivation mainly for grains and sweet potatoes. Rice was the staple food of the natives and hence paddy cultivation was absolutely necessary. Suitable soil and water were essential for paddy fields. This lead to more digging in *thottam* which were converted to *avul* (field). Such fields are seen in the middle of Androth island and in the southern part of Kalpeni island. They were made near the residential areas according to the availability
of water. These fields were later known as pacha. But in Kalpeni island even now they are called thottam. Perhaps they were made individually before the common thottam was developed. The main cultivation in the pacha was paddy.

What is noteworthy in these places seems to be that the agricultural technology which was invented to suit the geographical peculiarities of the area of occupation and the human interaction with the nature which resulted in the reclamation of more cultivable land probably due to the pressure of population growth. This process was followed in almost all the taravad islands except in Agathi where it was not successful.

The heap of soil accumulated, during digging to make thottam and avul was called kunnu. Whatever small mounts or hills found on the islands were man made and not naturally formed as in the case of mainland. There was no cultivation at the top of kunnu in the early days. Some natural growth was of course there. If we examine a section of 'kunnu' we can clearly understand the structure. (See the diagram annexure 7.) The base of the kunnu is a rock. Above this rock is the soil
which was heaped. This soil is full of vegetative debris and this seems to indicate that the soil was removed with some vegetation. An explanation to the formation of the kunnu is that they were made by those who dug out the thottam into a cultivable piece of land. The bed rock below the soil was taken out and they were used for building houses. The soil on the kunnu is generally loose. This shows that the ‘kunnu’ was formerly an ordinary flat land. Sometimes two layers of loose black soil can be seen on some hills. This shows the work of two generations. This process had two phases. One is the preparation of cultivable land. While the land was under preparation, large amount of rocks was dug out. A local specialization in stone working was also perhaps the result of this process. Each thottam, kunnu, and avul are pointers to this process.

Water was always present in the ‘thottam’ and the ‘avul’. Foreseeing the unexpected draughts separate pits called ‘kuvval’ were made. ‘Kulam’ (pond) also was there which were used for bathing and not for irrigation. But the place names like ‘kuttiyapperi’ are

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3 Dr N. Muthukoya, Lakshadweep Nootandukalilude. P.46.
exemptions. There are different forms of hydraulic management invented to suit the necessities of the islands.

‘Kuvali’ is mainly used to wet the dry cudgent leaves and to decay the husk of coconut. The farmers made arrangements namely *otti* (autti) – an irrigation channel used for water supply for agriculture.

The geographical features and structure of ‘*thottam*’ in Androth island points to organised and continuous effort for centuries together. To begin with there must have been a small group who prepared ‘pacha’ for cultivation. Later when new generations appeared on the same island they made a great change in the nature of the island. By digging *kad* they made *thottam* and *avul* which resulted in the formation of *kunnu*. All this activities of converting the surface of the land might have taken a long time and continuous effort particularly in the absence of modern implements and technology. This is the story of unfailing human energy jointly utilized for a common cause, which developed local specialisation in stone working.
There was a possibility for the ‘thottam’ (kad) to continue as common property for a few centuries. Such areas became possessions of families and individuals at a later stage. We are lead to an inference like this by the presence of beliyathottam of Androth and ‘beliyakallom’ of Kalpeni island. The places where collective farming took place in Kalpeni were known as ‘ayappa’ (ayam means land) and when a ‘ayappu’ was divided it was known as ‘phottayappe’ (pakutta ayapp - partitioned land).  

The community mentioned such a sustained relation with the land for their day today life. Some times they recognise the position of land, with the words ‘bayul’ (vathil). keel (east, under). The land obtained from government on lease were called ‘Kanda’ such agricultural lands are also called by the names ‘cowl’ karaima, pervili and pattam. The native also called different land by the names cheru, chikkal, pini, unda, ola, kalkkayam, koonam, compam, baimpu, muttam, utili, kuli, phutti.

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4 Here we find that the arable land goes divided, before that period lands may have been cultivated by the society or groups as a whole

5 In Lakshadweep leased land (pattabhoomi) comes in different sections, Cowl (long lease), karaima (tree tax), pervili, pattam etc
outti etc. based on the structure of land. Among them all types except outti were the result of natural phenomena, thereby indicating a fuller idea of various lands and their uses.

The people who connected the place names to natural phenomena had utilized the environmental conditions for their livelihood. They called these conditions accordingly. They called the same sea with different names based on how the sea was used. There are channels small and large from the sea to the seashore. These channels which were used to load cargo in the vessel to mainland, fishing, treatment of coconut husk are some of these uses. The channels were named ali, aar, thodu, paru, bella, parali, kalam, parambu are a few names given to the areas of sea touching the coast. Odom – it was the only means of transportation came in and went out through ‘ali’. Odoms were anchored inside ‘ali’. Beliyali, kunchali, perali, pottichaliku etc. are thus formed. Ware houses and shops were constructed near ali. They were called pantiyala and srambi respectively. A town ship gradually developed
near the main ali. A familiar name which the natives remembered from their contact with Kannur and Kozhikode, namely Belaram / Velapuram was given to this place. Thus Belaram became the center in Androth for import and export business.

Meat, egg and milk were not much available. Cattle breeding as well as poultry was not commonly practiced. Cattles were imported mainly for the purpose of meat to be used on special occasions such as marriage and other religious functions. Egg was not a usual food item but was added to prepare special dishes. It was not necessary to pay anything for eggs since relatives and neighbours used to offer them free of cost during such functions.

Vegetables were not main ingredients of food. So they were not procured and sold in the shops. Muringa, papaya, bread fruit and colocassia were grown in the island itself and were available free of cost, certain items like bimbi, varaku, rice, sweet potatoes etc. also were cultivated for food purpose. So they did not come to the shops for sales. Plantains were grown in almost every family. It was also not a commodity. Neighbours and relatives gifted bunch of banana during
marriage occasions. But Logon has recorded that agricultural products were exported from Kalpeni to Kavarathi island and exchanged for coconut seedling. It is said that lemons, drum stick and ghee were compulsorily sent from the islands during regime of the Arakkal ruling family.

Besides the above agricultural products, the chief economic source of islands was coconut. Copra was exported from Lakshadweep at least three times a year. The fourth trip of odam went to mainland loaded with coir. Jaggery, vinegar and coconut leaves are also produced from coconut tree. Seeds of Punna were also sent from the islands occasionally. Money was not present in the transactions but the exchanges were all based on money value and therefore the mode of exchange of the islands cannot be considered as barter.

There are place names to identify certain areas in the outer sea. This type of naming to the sea based on the special character of nature is

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6 "... on the whole Kalpeni may be said to be on which nearby produces the food supply necessary for the support of its inhabitants, and this is clearly shown by the fact that they export a large quantity of the produce of the thottam (grain, plantains and sweet potatoes), fish, oil and dried fish to the other island (mainly Kavaratti) getting in exchanged coconuts, young plants, jaggery and coir. William Logon. Malabar Vol. II Appendix – Kalpeni island – Madras. P.CCXVI.
seen only in the Lakshadweep islands. *Param* is dug in the *aar* on the sea shore to keep coconut husk for decaying. Each family has their own *Param*, which could be sold or given on lease to others. The fibre made out of husk treated in *param* had much demand. The husk taken out from *param* after a period of six months contain very soft fibre. The coir made of this fibre would have golden colour due to the bleaching effect of the sea water. The term ‘*choodi*’ is also used to mean a particular length of coir. A bunch of 16 *choodi* becomes a *siya* in Kalpeni. 15 kgms. of coir when bundled together is called *benti* which was exchanged for 16 ser (quantity) of rice. This practice is not seen now. Coir is a very important material in the production of *odam* (sailing vessels) in the olden days. The planks were glued and strongly tied to make odoms. A special type of coir used was called *tuttar*. Tuttar was thin but stronger.7

‘*Balel*’ is comparatively thicker type of coir used to make rope.8

This rope is necessary to tie the anchor, to keep the vessel from floating away and also to pull the vessel upto the land and pulling at from the

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7 The best coir yarn must have some standard qualities. Anjengo coir yarn with 20 score, 260 runnage is considered as the best. One kilogram such coir yarn have 260 meters.

8 There are mainly three types of Ropes. They are Hawsera lad (¼” diameter), Shrawa lad above ¼” (and upto 1 ¼” diameter) and cable lad (above 1 ½ diameter). Island coir is best for making rope.
land to the sea. In the sailing schedule of the vessels from islands to mainland, one voyage was exclusively for carrying coir as cargo. The coir produced in Lakshadweep was in much demand on the mainland. It is recorded that Portuguese people were attracted to the islands because of coir. The women folk of the island used to assemble in one house in the night to produce coir. This was an occasion for them to rejoice. In the light of the hurricane lamps the coir is come out from the expert hands along with the tunes of folk songs.

The export and import activities were carried out using sailing vessels. Wood from Indian coast was imported and used along with certain type of wood available in the island itself. Punna and cheerani have thus got a connection to the place names. Whatever trees seen in the islands except coconut tree are included in Marine wood. The propagation and use of these wood are already described in the previous chapter.

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The place name *tukkitithottam* recalls, the British regime. *Arakkalapattam* is also such a name, the office of the Karyakkar of the island was formerly known as Arakkal. The Adi Rajahs and Arakkal Bibi’s were the rulers of islands. *Pattuli’s* and *Amaldari* come to the island to collect tax. This was indicated by the place names *pattolithottam* and *nelkkari amal thottam*. Karyakkars were the island representatives of British. The following place names show their presence: *Karyakarathottam*, *karyakarakunnu*, *karyakarakanda*, *karyakarakalam*. The common island natives either respected the law to a great extent or were afraid of the same. Karyakkar and karnavammar ruled the innocent and ignorant common men.

The unit of society was family. Properties belong to the families. There are many place names containing family names. Everybody in the family worked for mutual benefit. Androth and Kalpeni islands followed matrilinny. Properties were divided and transferred to the thavazhi of maternal uncle who was the head of the family. The wife and children get annual quota of rice and cloth from the husbands. This system was called ‘Ayyalave’. Hence the marital relation was not so strong. Remarriage was allowed. One mother might have children by many
husbands; the father had many children in many wives. The direct attention of the father was not available to the children, since the uncles were responsible for their welfare. The children of brothers and sisters belong to different families but at the same time children of the sisters belonged to the same family. Marriages between the children of brothers and sisters was in common. Marriage between the children of brothers was rare. But marriage between the children of sisters was not allowed, because they belong to the same family.

When the number of women in a household increases naturally it leads to setting up of more houses in the vicinity. It may or may not be proximate in most probable cases it would be in a single piece of land. Their houses may be collectively known as family. Even though each branch or extension has its own property and possessions, the routine of one who would lead to the prosperity of the other. In this sort of groups the first house would be known as avuthu and another one house would be known as pera. The other houses would be sharing a common house name. It has also been noticed that in some cases without any relationship whatsoever the families come together. Some times when a dispute or a conflict arises, a prominent family would help the other
family in trouble. This would lead to the family accepting the help to add on the name of the prominent family as a mark of respect. Some people have also established this right by indulging the court.

It is highly improbable that the first immigrants on the Islands would have built houses made of stone. By the passage of time construction style slowly changed from thatched roofs to that made of stone. Half a century back houses thatched with tiles were very rare. The family names of most houses evolved from the names of places. There are quiet a number of family names which are evolved from the names of individuals. In such cases it would be relatively never ones. ‘Pura, Ada. (Avidam, Avide) Chetta’ etc. are added as ‘suffix’s to family names. More than 27 generic have been found to be used under such circumstances. The word ‘Chetta’ is used as a synonym for hut (olakudil –olachetta)”. Even though the style of construction has changed from huts to re-inforced concrete the suffixes still remain so. Such houses come under the ‘Melacheri’ group; two rare families have been found under similar condition which are from the ‘Koya’ and Mali. We can also find a few houses with suffix ‘illam’ in two islands. In Malabar, the term illam is used to denote a brahman house but this is a common term
of the Dravidian languages. Originally, it meant a household, possibly an extended family. Some of these names are newly added ones. Houses with such suffixes could be found in all the three groups. Repetition of names is also common. Some names which are found in the mainland and other islands may also be found in these two Islands.