Chapter I

PRILIMINARIES: EXTERNAL FEATURES OF ANDROTH AND KALPENI, THE THARAVAD ISLANDS

Lakshadweep

Lakshadweep is a group of 36 islands in the Arabian sea. Among these, eleven islands are inhabited. Lakshadweep is the smallest Union Territory having a land area of only 32 sq.km. If we consider the area of lagoon (4,200 sq.km.), the territorial waters (20,000 sq.km), and the economic zone (about 4,000,000 sq.km) this is a large one.

The geographical position of Lakshadweep is between 200 km and 400 km away from the west coast of Kerala and between 8° and 14°13' North latitude and 71° and 74° East longitude. The easternmost island is Androth and the western most is Bitra. Minicoy is in the south extreme and Chetlath is in the north extreme. Androth island is 139 Nautical miles away from Kozhikode. Minicoy island is the farthest one from Kerala coast. Islands themselves are located at different distances from each other, the shortest distance being 9.6 km. between Amini and Kadmath.
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<th>Islands with their areas in sq. kilometres</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Agathí</td>
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<td>2. Amini</td>
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<td>3. Androth</td>
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<td>4. Bangaram</td>
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<td>5. Bitra</td>
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<td>6. Chethlath</td>
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<td>7. Kadmath</td>
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<td>8. Kalpeni</td>
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<td>9. Kavarathí</td>
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<td>10. Kilthan</td>
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<td>11. Minicoy</td>
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<th>Uninhabited islands with their areas in sq.Kms.</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Cheriyam</td>
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<td>2. Kalpitti</td>
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<td>3. Kodithala</td>
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<td>4. Pachipitti</td>
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<td>5. Parali</td>
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<td>6. Pitli</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Suhali (Cheriyakara)</td>
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<td>8. Suhali (Valiyakara)</td>
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<td>9. Tilakkam</td>
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<td>10. Tinnakara</td>
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<td>11. Viringili</td>
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The uninhabited islands are owned by the people of the nearest island. Thus, the islands Cheriyam, Kodithala, Tilakkam and Pitti are owned by the families of Kalpeni. Suhali, big and small belong to Kavarathi. Tinnakara, Parali, Kalpitti and Bangaram are owned by the people of Agathi. Viringili is under the management of the Amin of Minicoy. Pacchipitti is a bird sanctuary looked after by the Union territory of Lakshadweep.

The new reefs and tiny islets that are in the process of formation are not included in the above table. Originally Bangaram was an uninhabited island with coconut groves owned by the islanders of Agathi. Recently the island was opened to international tourism and this needed the presence of a number of functionaries in various capacities. The population of Bangaram is thus constituted by facilitators of tourists and the necessary officials to run various establishments.

Geology

There are two theories about the formation of islands in general. One theory says that some portions of a continent separates themselves owing to natural causes and move away from the continent due to
tectonic changes to form an island. A second theory suggests that islands are formed due to volcanic eruption. When the volcanic island became completely submerged an atol was formed encircling the lagoon where, with the action of the wind, waves and currents, and temperature the coral islands are formed.

It has been argued that corals grow on the submerged reef. The atols are resulted due to such growth of corals. Ancient volcanoes are there beneath such atolls. Corals grow and spread at their edge. Planular larvae settled down on the coral reef and their growth cause the formation of reef in general. The reef protects the islands from the waves of the sea. The land portion is formed by the weathering of dead corals which are the hard calcaeous skeleton of organisms called polyps. In due course, the sea birds make the islands their habitat.

Lakshadweep islands are coral islands. The Aravalli ranges of Rajasthan and Gujarat are extended to the Arabian sea and it has been

3 Ibid. p.99.
observed that Lakshadweep islands are the result of coral growth on these ranges. All these islands except Androth are situated in the north south direction. One interesting fact is that the coral reef encircling each island is found only on the western side of them. Androth island has no lagoon since its growth is completed. Amini island also is almost a complete one. Only a very small lagoon with a boundary of coral reef is seen on the western side of this island. All other islands are still growing.

Climate

The climate of Lakshadweep is almost the same as that of coastal Kerala. There are two rainy seasons: The South West monsoon from June to September and the North East monsoon from November to January. An Average of 80% of the monsoon rain is obtained from the South West Monsoon. About 1600-mm rain is obtained every year. Temperature is between 24° to 36°. It can be observed that the humidity on the islands is at a higher rate. Androth, Kalpeni and Minicoy islands are situated in the declared cyclone prone area.
Flora and Fauna

The islands in general have a rich vegetation on the land as well as in the lagoon. The main cultivation on all the islands is coconut because of the suitable climatic conditions and the nature of the soil. The Flora of the islands include Banana (Musa Paradisiaca) Coloocasisa, Chembu (Colocassia antiquorum) Drums stick moringakkai (Moringa oleifera), Bread fruit/Chakka (Areca paripinnata), Wild almond (Terminalia Catappa), etc. From the islands 290 varieties of plants are collected. Among them 230 plants are growing on land area having flowers and seeds. Tamara, Kannu, Chonam and Cheruthalam are coastal native plants. The lagoons have some sea-weeds which are generally known as Pullu meaning grass and past or payal.

The fauna found in Lakshadweep are very few in number. Cows, sheep, cat and birds like hens and crows are common. There are islands without crows, such as Kavarathu and Kadamath. Ducks, parrots, doves and hocks are rare. Birds like Plovers, sand paers, curlew, whimpers etc. migrate to the islands every year. Crab plower, stone curlew, green shank, red shank, antarctic squa, lesser black backed gull, gull buled turn, white cheaked turn, brown winged turn etc. are also
migrating birds visiting the islands, sterna fuscata and anous soldos are also commonly seen. One island named “Pakki Pitti” (Birds Island) is declared a bird Sanctuary. Frogs, crabs, tortoise, lizards, chameleon, rats, butterflies, houseflies and mosquitoes are found in abundance in all the islands. However, this is not a complete list. We have noted only those flora and fauna which have some bearing in the formation of place names.

Origin of the Name Lakshadweep

It is not known how the ‘Lakshaweep’ got its name. The Arab travellers and geographers referred to these islands and Mahal islands together as “Male”

Till recent times Lakshadweep was known as

*Laccadives Minicoy & Amindivi islands*. These islands were officially declared “Lakshadweep” in Nov. 1973. Androth, Kalpeni, Kavarathi and Agatti were “Lakshadweep”; Amini, Kadmath, Kiltan, Chetlath & Bitra formed part of Amindivi. Minicoy was formerly known as “Mulk” meaning *nadh* (country).
Perhaps the Lakshadweep and Mahal islands together might have been referred to as Lakshadweep. Even if all the islands were taken together it does not come to one lakh of islands. In fact the term Lakshwadeep was not intended to indicate any correct number. Till the second part of the 20th Century there were islands in Mali, which were Uninhabited. Lakshadweep islands are situated in the sea route between Africa and Arabian Countries to Malabar coast. According to one opinion the name Lakshadweep might have been derived from the term “Lakshya (Destination)” and the Lakshyadeep became Lakshadweep. The Lakshadweep island were not a destination but only an interim stations for the sea-men. Such a place is quite unlikely to be called a destination spot lakshya.

According to another account the Britishers took over the Southern islands namely Androth, Kalpeni, Kavaratti and Agati from the Beebi of Arakkal family for a debt of Rs one Lakh. This opinion is not based on any tangible evidence. A reference to the name
Lakshadweep is seen in the usage “Deepa Laksha” in Vayalur inscription. The document “Bodugala miskeet-Lomafanu” in Mali Island refers to those islands as “Lakka”. The same document refers to both “Ahi Lakka (Distant Lakka) and Mahi Lakka” (Near Lakka). The near (mahi) one is Sri Lanka the term ahi indicated the Lakshadweep. The islands are known to the Dutch East India Company as Lakkardiva, meaning Laccadives.

There are some other references earlier to the above: In the Buddhist Jataka Stories, Bharu Jataka (No.213) there is a reference to “The thousand islands near the island of coconuts” which is Kerala, most probably. This could be Lakshadweep including the Mali islands.

There are allusions to Lakshadweep in “Khuddaka Pathaka” of Pali Language like “Opposite to 2000 of tiny islands.” Periplus (AD

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7 Clarence Maloney, People of Maldiv Islands, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1980, p.50.
9 Rhydavards, T.W., Pali-English Dictionary 1925 quoted from Clarence Maloney People of Maldiv Islands, p.47.
10 Quoted from Clarence Maloney, People of Maldiv Islands, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1980 P.52
90), 10a Ptolemy (AD 150), 10b Ammianus Marcelus (AD 362), 10c Aboosayyed (AD 950), 10d Abulhassan, Al Biruni (AD 1030), 10e Aldrissi (1099-1168) 10f MaHuan (1433), 10g Barbosa (AD 1517), 10h Albert Grey (AD 1606) 10h and Shaik Sainuddeen Makedoon 10j also refer to Lakshadweep in several contexts. None of these earlier mention gives us any clue about the origin, antiquity or meaning of the nomenclature.

10b Ptolemy (AD 127-141) mentioned the Islands as Undevoo (Androlh) Kamathva (Kavaththi), Aigidian (Agathi), Monache (Mincov), Ammine (Amini) and Kalpen (Kalpeni), Ptolemys Geography, in Mc Crindle, P. 250.
10i The voyage of Francois Pyard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, he Moluccas and Brazil. Trans. Albert Gray. 2 Vols, Hakluyt Society, London, 1888 (1611, 1615 and 1619).
Andrott Island

Andrott is the largest island in the Lakshadweep group with an area of 4.8 sq.km of land mass in the East-West direction. The Eastern side of this island is narrow and western side is broad. The waves hit the coast directly since there is no lagoon. The sea is comparatively rough at the southern part and therefore, the Odams (Country vessels) anchor at the northern side.

The Geographical position of this island is between 10° to 48” of northern latitude and 73° - 41” eastern longitude. The people of other islands used to say that “Androt smells Malayalam”.

While Ptolomy refers to the islands, he mentions Andrott as Undevoo. Al Idrissi says “Ambriya island is the largest among them”.11 The map given by Ma Huan in his travelogue has recorded Andrott as An-tu-li-liu. Shaik Sainuddin called this island “Androo”. Albert Grey refers to the same island as “Anderon”.12 Dr. C.G. Pookoya explains that Androth is called Andros in Roman records and the meaning is an island

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11 Clarence Maloney says that this is about the Maldivian Island Hanover. People of Maldive Islands. Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1980. p.419.
12 Refer 10.4
which is 'inhabited'. The people of northern island call this island "Androme" and its inhabitants as "Andraar". Many local folksongs refer to this island as Anthudweep, Attura and Andura.

Andrott island is divided into four cherries as follows: 1) Keecheri (East), 2) Mecheri (West) 3. Chemmacheri (South), 4) Edacheri (North). Between Chemmacheri and other cherries there are areas for cultivation, which are called thottam in the local parlance.

The sailing vessels came to Melacheri. The most important anchoring point is Belaram. A township is developing around this point. Most of the business concerns are functioning here. Belaram is more or less in the middle of the northern coast. Kunchaliyar, Aachiyaar, Tharvakkeyar and Anthatmpalliyaar were the anchoring points from where boats were loaded and unloaded.

Coconut farming and coir making were the main occupation of the people in early days. Other small scale crops were also raised in the

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1 Dr. C.G. Pookaya, Lakshadweep the early history and settlement, paper presented on seminar on Lakshadweep History, Kavaratti, 2001 (unpublished)
gardens. These included sweet potato, ragi and varaku apart from paddy.

The island society consisted of three sections, namely, Koya, Mali and Melacheri. The native inhabitants are all Muslims. The remaining are government servants from the main land. Some evidences are obtained from the island which encourage us to believe that Budhism was spread in this island before the advent of Islam. Hazrath Ubaidullah, according to some legends, propagated islam in Lakshadweep and his family lived in Andrott. His tomb is still seen near the Andrott Juma Masjid. Rifai thareekath and Kadiriya tharikath of Sufi cult have reached this island also.

Kalpeni

Kalpeni is the nearest island to Kochi, 155 nautical miles. And 87 km from the nearest island Andrott. The geographical position is between north 10° - 5° latitude and 73° - 39° east longitude. This Island is blessed by nature and has a very large lagoon; cheriyam, Tilakkam and Pitti are tiny uninhabited islets within the lagoon of this island. They are full of coconut trees.
According to Ellis, Kalpeni main island is 495 acres and together with the 5 islets has an area of 650 acres. From the north end of Cheriyam to the south end of Kalpeni, this island is seven miles in length. The broadest part is 1 5 miles according to W. Logan.14

Arab writers called this Island "Kol Baini". Travellers, like MaHuan and Shaik Sainuddeen, the author of Tuhfatul-Mujahadeen also mention Kalpeni. The Romans called this island 'Kalpen' (Beautiful lagoon).

Our observations regarding Agriculture, occupations and religion of Andrott island are applicable to the island of Kalpeni also. According to legends Hazrat Ubaidullah visited this island to propagate islam. The society contains three sections. Viz. Koya, Mali and Meelacheri as in the case of Andrott.

14 W. Logan. Malabar, Vol.11 Appendix XXI P CCXIV.
Andrott and Kalpeni islands are known as “Taravattu Deepukal” meaning the original home-islands. This would seem to indicate that perhaps those who were inhabited in the initial stages of migration to the islands. Though there is small dialectical variations in speech habits of the islands, people can easily communicate with each other. Till recently both Andrott and Kalpeni were under the administrative control of the same Tahsildar.