



A RELOOK ON AN ABANDONED STRUCTURE AMIDST ARIKAMEDU

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Abstract:

Arikamedu is an ancient Indo-Roman trading centre on the east coast near Pondicherry. It attracts now and then for its hidden treasure of Roman coins, beads, earthen ware etc. Once it was a flourishing trade of the Tamils with foreigners, especially the Romans. Only a portion of the Arikamedu area has been excavated so far and now that too was closed. The visitors, Tourist and Public both Indian and Foreigners would have noticed a building complex in a dilapidated condition. Unguided people and a few historians mistook it for the remains of the Arikamedu Trading centre. It is not so it is the Roman Catholic Seminary which came into existence in the middle of the 18th century. This paper examines the Abandoned Structure Amidst Arikamedu.

Key Words: Dilapidated, Seminary, Congregation, Ruins & Cemeteries

Introduction:

The so called Arikamedu, the ancient Indo-Roman trading centre¹ on the east coast near Pondicherry attracts the historians now and then for its hidden treasure of Roman coins, beads², earthen ware³ etc., which stand as physical evidences of the once flourishing trade of the Tamils with foreigners, especially the Romans.⁴

In the year 1937 the Arikamedu⁵ was first taken up for research study by an young priest named Fauchaux of the Congregation of Montford Gabriel Brothers along with the French Professor Jouveau Dubreuil. Only a portion of the Arikamedu area has been excavated so far and now that too was closed. In the Arikamedu area, to be precise near the site Arikamedu I (A.K.I) of Southern sector and site Arikamedu II (A.K.II) of Northern sector (vide A.S.I 1945 Map indicating the "French Mission House - Ruins") the visitors would have noticed a building complex in a dilapidated condition.⁶ Unguided people and a few historians mistook it for the remains of the Arikamedu Trading centre. It is not so it is the Roman Catholic Seminary which came into existence in the middle of the 18th century.

When the French Missionary Fathers (MEP)⁷ came to India for their Apostolic service they thought of opening a seminary to train up priests for the Church and in the year 1771,⁸ they constructed the buildings for that Apostolic service purpose. The first sector of the Seminary which was approved by Pope Pious VI as the "College Generale, Virampattinam,"⁹ was Mgr. Pigneau de Behaine. As this Priest's School was the only one of its kind in the Asian region, there were Chinese, Annamese and Indians. Whereas, the strength of the Indian students were very poor and owing to their racial difference it was closed in the year 1781 due to its poor strength and a new one was started in Oulgaret and Pondicherry in the subsequent years. After the British attack in 1792¹⁰ the Veeram Pattinam seminary was being used as a hospital. Till the end of the 19th century for the students of Pondicherry it was a "Holiday Resort".¹¹

Methodology:

By employing both primary and secondary sources this paper has been attempted. Architectural Motifs Ancient building material remains, and Pottery are the major and authentic source materials for writing this paper and it is supplemented by Recent archaeological Excavations and Project Reports. The methodology adopted in this study is descriptive and analytical.

Conclusion:

The forgoing study clearly reveals the fact that the building complex now in ruins is 231 years old. Its majestic gateway, three sect thick walls of main building, arch doorways, drinking water well, lawns and gardens around, all speak their glorious past. It is recorded that the large sized 'Roman-bricks' found in the Arikamedu site have been used in the construction of the Seminary buildings and this could be seen in the portico. Excepting the Christian Cemeteries, this is the "Oldest structure of the Pondicherry Archdiocese". By all counts the "Seminare de Virampatinam" or *Samiyar Bungalow* as the local people call it, carries with it a long history and it should be declared and protected as a "Historical Monument".

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