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KCHR PUBLIC TALK

DEPICTIONS OF  
THE PORTS AND  
SETTLEMENTS  
OF THE CERA COUNTRY  
IN THE EARLY TAMIL LITERATURE

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HYBRID MODE

**THURSDAY | 13 JUNE 2024 | 3:00 PM (IST)**

**At KCHR Pattanam Campus, N. Paravur**

KERALA COUNCIL FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH

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# ABSTRACT

Kerala, known as Cera country, was one of the important coastal regions of India with strong maritime relationships with the Indian Ocean regions from the early times. Strategic location of Kerala in the Indian Ocean, the monsoon winds and its natural spice wealth have all contributed to its maritime significance. Among the sources for early history of Kerala, the corpus of Tamil texts known as the Sangam literature offers important information of the ports and settlements of Kerala. The Greco-Roman texts too offer insights on the early settlements and landscapes of Kerala. In this lecture, I focus on the references to the early ports and settlements of the Cera country found in the Tamil texts. Muciri, Tondi and other ports and settlements of Cera country find mention in the early Tamil literature. Unlike the texts of Greco-Roman origin, the Tamil texts speak about the local conditions. The poems speak about the nature, landscapes, people associated with the coastal regions, political and social conditions. For example, a poem in the *Purananuru* (126, 14-16) says:

“சினம் மிகு தானை வானவன் குட கடல்,  
பொலம் தரு நாவாய் ஓட்டிய அவ் வழி,  
பிற கலம் செல்கலாது அணையேம் அத்தை”

*cinam miku tanai vanavan kuda kadal  
polam taru navay ottiya av vazhi  
pira kalam selkalakatu anaiyem attai*

These lines mention that “the Vanavan (i.e., Cera) with a fierce army would not allow other watercraft to cross the waterway through which the navai (watercraft) that offered the wealth (gold) was driven on the western sea.” We do not know the precise context and implication of these lines; but they convey the idea that the Ceras had prevented other watercraft to cross or go near the ships that brought the precious wealth. This poem does not specify any particular port or settlement, but suggest the regulations enforced by the Ceras on the west coast. This could imply that the Ceras wanted to restrict the probable attempts of piracy. This lecture presents about the nature of the ports, maritime activities, and political conditions as depicted in the early Tamil literature.





# Dr. V. Selvakumar

V Selvakumar is Head, Department of Maritime History and Marine Archaeology, and Coordinator at Centre for Indian Ocean Studies at the Tamil University, Thanjavur. He has played key roles in several important archeology projects in India, including the excavation at Pattanam, Kerala. His writings have appeared in numerous journals and edited volumes, and his book-length publications include *Tamil Cultural Connections Across the World* (2010) and *Amaravati: Essays on History, Archaeology and Numismatics* (2017, Ed.) Selvakumar is currently Scholar-in-Residence at the Pattanam Campus of the Kerala Council for Historical Research.

Date and Time : June 13, 2024 | Thursday | 3 pm IST

Venue : KCHR Pattanam Campus, N Paravur | Hybrid Mode

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