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**Sri Rama Sethu
in Literature- A truth**

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Sri Rama's Sethu in Literature- A truth

Annal Kakutthan Aazhpunal Sethuvai,
Kanninal orukal Kanda manavan
Ennil Velvi Tavam Punal Yattirai,
Panni Muttriya Panpudaiyan Aro !!

- Sethu Puranam - Sethu Sarukkam - Verse 16

"One who sees the 'sethu' built by the great Rama, who is also called Kakutthan once, will perform countless yagnas, tapas and tirtha yatras and will remain a man of great strength and character", says Sethu Purana.

1.1. The word 'sethu' means 'anai', 'seikarai'¹. Tamil Akaramudali gives the meaning 'anaikkattu' (dam) to the word 'sethubandhanam'². Kamban, who wrote the Tamil classic 'Kamba Ramayanam' also refers as 'sethubandhanappadalam'³. All these points make it clear that this was built by human beings.

1.2. 'Sethu' is the waterbody in which SriRama purified himself from 'Brammahatti dosha' on his return from Lanka after killing Ravana. It is located in the sea in Rameshwaram area near 'sethubandhanam'. Abhidhanakosam⁴ calls 'Sethubandhanam' as 'Tiruvanai' - a dam or bridge built by Sri Rama and the Vanara Sena (Monkey's army) in the sea to cross over it and reach Sri Lanka. Further, Rameshwara Talapuram calls all these happenings as "Sethu Puranam".

1.3. 'Somalay'⁵, a great Tamil scholar says 'sethu' was the dam built by Sri Rama in order to crossover to Srilanka with his huge vanara sena (monkey army) with the help of monkey leaders.

1.4. 'Tiruppullani' - which is at a distance of 6 miles from Ramanathapuram (Ramnad) is known as 'Pullaranyam', 'Pullanai', 'Adisethu', 'Tiruvanai' and 'Sethukkarai'⁶

1.5. 'Namadheepa Nikhandu' names 'seikarai' as 'seikarai', 'kurambu', 'sethu', and 'kulai'⁷. It also names Rameshwaram as 'Sethupuram' and 'Ramasuram'⁸.

1.6. The area surrounding 'sethu' - the dam built by Sri Rama on sea is called as 'sethunadu'. Kalaikkalangiyam (Tamil encyclopedia)⁹ refers to 'Ramanathapuram district' as 'Sethu Nadu'.

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1. Tamil - Tamil Akaramudali - Editor M.Shanmukam Pillai - Tamil Nadu Text Book Society, A Government of Tamil Nadu Publication - First Edition - Jine 1985.
 2. Valmiki Ramayanam - Yuddha Kandam - Sarukka 22 - Sethubandha
 3. Kamba Ramayanam - Yuddha Kandam - Sethubandhanappadalam
 4. Abhidhanakosam - The Tamil Classical Dictionary - Yazhpanattu Manippai A.Muthuthambi Pillai - Asian Educational Services - First Published 1902
 5. Namadu Tamil Nadu Series 9 - Ramanathapuram Mavattam - Somalay - Pari Nilayam Chennai, May 1972 - P.33
 6. Pullai Andati - Thanjai Saraswati Mahal Publication 116 - 1967- P.2, Price 1.25
 7. Namadeepa Nikandu - Idavargam - P.159 - verse 54 (Nurpa 530)
 8. Namadeepa Nikandu - Idavargam - P.153 - verse 33 (Nurpa 509)
 9. Kalaikkalangiyam - Volume 5 - Tamil Valarcci Kazhakam, Chennai - First edition - 1958 - P.207

Sethu bandhanam in epics

2.1. Valmiki¹⁰ describes the construction of 'Sethu', which was built in a record time of 5 days under the leadership of Nala, the son of Viswakarma, in his Ramayana in 25 verses. Rama asks Nala to construct a dam on the sea to Srilanka, as advised by Samudraraja. Nala agrees and Vanaras who looked like high mountains went in all directions and brought mountain like rocks and stones. They brought trees, either cut or uprooted.

The vanara sena uprooted rocks which resembled huge elephants, using machines and brought them to the seashore with the help of carrier vehicles. "The dam constructed by Nala who was as skilled and talented as his illustrious father, looked like milky way" says Valmiki. The joyous roar raised by the vanaras on completion of the dam silenced even the deadliest noise of the mighty ocean.¹¹

2.2. Valmiki further describes in another verse in the words of Rama returning with Sita in a Pushpaka Vimana in 'Yuddha Kanda' of Adyatma Ramayanam as follows:

"Here is the Sethubandhana worshipped by three worlds. It is a holy place. It has the ability to relieve all the greatest of sins. It is here 'Mahadeva' [Lord Siva] extended his whole hearted support to me earlier."¹²

2.3. After initiating the construction of Sethu, Rama installed the idol of 'Rameshwara', and worshipped. Then he said, "Those who worship Rameshwara by observing fasting and prayer, those who perform 'abhiseka' with the holy water of Ganga brought by them from Kasi - all their sins will be thrown in to the mighty ocean. They will attain 'moksha' (Mukti) without any doubt", says Adhyathma Ramayanam about Sethu bandhanam and its holiness.¹³

2.4. Ananda Ramayanam¹⁴ describes the beginning of the construction of the dam as follows: 'Rama, who hails from Raghu Dynasty, installed the idol of Lord Vinayaka after explaining about the dam to Nala. Then Rama worshipped the 9 stones installed by Nala, representing the 9 planets. He then conveyed his willingness to Hanuman about installing a wonderful linga in his name where the three seas meet.

2.5. "The mountain like dam 'Nalasethu' was built as per the orders of Rama" says Vyasa in his Mahabharatha¹⁵.

10. Hastimathran Mahakaya: Basha Namsa Mahabala: Parvathamsa Samuthpatya yanthrai: parivahantisa - Valmiki Ramayanam - Yuddha Kandam Sarukkam 22 - Verse 58

11. Valmiki Ramayanam - Sarukkam 22 - Slokas 51 - 75

12. Yetat drushyate tirtham sagarasya mahatmana:

Sethubhandha idikyathan Trilokyenapi poojitham\

Yetat pavitram paramam mahapataka nasanam

Atra purvam Mahadeva: Prastha Maharotaprabhu: - Valmiki Ramayanam - Yuddha Kandam - 126.20.1

13. Adyathma Ramayanam - Yuddha Kandam

14. Ananda Ramayanam - Sarakandam (Sarukkam 10 - verse 69)

15. Mahabharatham 3.267.45

Puranas

3.1. Bhagavatha Puranam says that Balarama went to the dam which can purify even the greatest sins. 'Samudhram Se Mahamath Mahapataka Nasanam', Says Bhagavatha¹⁶.

3.2. Padma Puranam¹⁷ says, "this sethu was built by me within 3 days with the help of Vanara Sena."

3.3. Skanda Purana¹⁸ says the mere vision of Rama Sethu will relieve one from Samsara bandhas.

Thus, Epics and Puranas say that the dam Sethu was built in the middle of the sea by Rama and say that it is a holy one.

Literature

4.1. There is a reference to Sethu in Tamil Sangam classic Akananuru¹⁹ which compares the sound made in a village to that of the sound heard from the sea near 'Thriuvanaikkarai (Adi Sethu), in Pandya Kingdom which was built by Rama, the great warrior.

4.2. Periyavaccan Pillai, one of the Vaishnava Acharyas, writes as

"Malaiyal Anaikatti Marukarai eri"²⁰ in his Pasurappadi Ramayanam.

4.3. 'Sethu Puranam' also known as 'Sethu Mahatmiyam' - a sangam classic which contains 45 Sarukkas and 3438 verses and which was written by Niramba Alagiya Singar (16th Century) and Verified by Nallur Arumuga Navalar of Jaffna and published by Chidambaram Saivapparakasa Vidyasala Dharmaparipalakas. Sri Ponnusamy Thevar of Ramanathapuram Samasthanam took up the efforts to publish this work to which Sodashavadanam Subbiraya Chettiyar, a deciple of Tiricirapuram Mahavidvan Meenatchisundaram Pillai has contributed the 'Sirappuppayiram'. In that, he has sung in praise of Sethu as - 'Titara oduum Sethu Manmiyatthai'. Another poet Kumarasami Pillai has mentioned as 'Sethumanyamana vadanul thannai'. In the prayer song of 'Sethu Puranam' the dam built by Sri Rama has been mentioned as "Tuya Seer Ramasethu".

Sethu's greatness and its holiness has been sung in 64 verses in the chapter 'Sethu Sarukkkam'. The necessity to built Sethu for Sri Rama has been explained in Sethu Vanda Sarrukkam'. After explaining 'Sethu Madhava Sarukkam', Sethu Yatthirai Sarukkam', the benefits reaped in merely thinking about Sethu and taking the holy dip are detailed in 151 verses. Tala Puranam²¹ (Volume I) in Tamil literature also mentions about 'Sethu puranam'.

16. Bhagavathapuranam 10th Skandam - Sarukkam 79

17. Padmapuranam - Srustikandam - Sarukkam 38

18. Skandapuranam - Sethu Mahatmiya Kandam - Sarukkam 1

19. Venverkavuriyar tonmudukodi

Muzhangirum Bouvam Irangum Mundururai

velpor Raman arumaraik kavitha

Palvizh alamola oliyavindandru iv vazhungal ure - Akananuru - Kalirt - Padal 70

20. Vizhineer Ilankai aruli, saranpukka kuraikadalai

adalampal marukaeidu, tollai vilangu ani seyya

malayal anaikatti marukarai eri Pasurappadi Ramayanam - Yuddhakandam - Periyavaccan Pillai

21. Tamizhil Talapuranganal (Part 1) Dr.V.R.Madhavan - Tamil University - Thanjavur - P.193 - Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam Aid - 1995

4.4. It remained a traditional practice of Tamilians to give lectures in praise of 'Sethu Puranam'. Arumuga Navalar, who was one among those, has also written it in manuscripts. It was printed and published by Sri M.R.M.S. Ramalinga Pillai of Rameshwaram for 12 anas in the name of 'Sethu Makattuvam' (Rameshwara Manmiyam). This "Sethu Puranaprasangam" which begins with Suta Puran is narrating the story to Sounakadi Rishis in Naimisaranyam is a dialogue based one²².

4.5. "Anaiyalai Sulkadal Andradainadu Vazhiseithavan" ²³ says Thiru Gnana Sambandar in his Tevaram.

4.6. Thirunavukkarasar in his Tevaram sings the construction of the dam by Sri Rama as " Kadalidai Malaikal Tammal Adaittu Mal Karumam Muttri".²⁴

All the above references from epics puranas and literature - written in different languages, in different times stand testimony to the fact that the dam 'Sethu' was built as per the orders given by Sri Rama to Nala.

5.1. **Sethu Nadu:** The Samashthana of Ramanathapuram (Ramnad) was called as 'Sethu Nadu only because of the very existence of 'Sethu'. The king of this samashthana was known as Sethupati ²⁵, 'Sethu Kavalari [Lord of the Cause way]. Thirupullani which is at a distance of 6 miles southeast of 'Ramnad' is known as Adisethu. Ramayana says Sri Rama appointed people from Maravar community to protect 'Sethu' and the people who come to take a holy bath in it. One of the kings of 'Sethupati dynasty' constructed a town near 'Thirupullani'.

It was named as "Mugavai" as it stood as the gateway to reach 'Sethu'. Later it became Ramanathapuram²⁶. It is obvious that the kings of 'Sethu' had long cherished tradition. Among them, : Adiraghunatha Sethupati, Jeyatunga Raghunatha Sethupati, Ativeera Rahunatha Sethupati Varaguna Raghunatha Sethupati and 6 others are mentioned as the earliest ones of the Sethupati dynasty²⁷.

The names 'Rahunatha' and 'Sethupati' are attached to them, because of their relationship with Sri Rama [Who is also called Raghunatha] and the dam built by him. All the kings of this dynasty are called as 'Sethupati' by the people of successive generations. It stands as a clear testimony to the existence of Rama Sethu and also to the point that all the kings of the 'Sethupati' dynasty ruled this area with great devotion and dedication²⁸.

22. Inaiya Sethu Neeradinum, teendinum, idutanai eggnandru ninaivu
seikinum kankinum, ketpinum, neengidun tuyarellam anaiyum
atthanmayidum mayavan arul seyyum ac Sethutanai
nikarppatondrillaiyam - tavaneri tazhaikkum andanarkalo - Sethubhandhana Makattuvam

23. Sanpanta Tevaram - verse 6

24. Thirunavukkarasar Tevaram - verse 3

25. Kalaikkalangiyam Volume 5 Tamil Valarccikkazhakam, Chennai - First Edition 1958

26. Rameshwaram (The Sacred Island) by Major H.A.Newell - Indian army - II edition

27. Abhidana Cintamani - A.Singaravelu Mudaliyar - V.1628 The Setupatis of Ramnad - Page 126, by S.Thiruvengkatachari

28. Kizhavan Setupati - M.Manoharan, 1983, Setupatikai Varalaru - Chiranjeevi 1981

5.2. Things have changed dramatically since the inception of Ramanathapuram district in 1910. The finalization of manual about the political, geographical, industrial, agricultural, economical growth, besides information about population its distribution, transport, revenue, ports, holy places got a final shape after passing through several stages in 1968. It was released only in 1972 after making necessary changes.

The foreword to the district manual of Ramanathapuram released by the then Chief Minister of Tamilnadu, Sri M. Karunanidhi is note worthy.

“The task of collecting and publishing the district manuals was given top priority after independence and was given preference in the five year plans. The District manual of today is not only a guide furnishing mear information. It is of great help containing several important topics and can be used very much as a source of great reference. A manual throws light on our age and traditions and long cherished culture. It serves as a mirror which reflects our society. Once having a thorough knowledge of the manual we can march forward keeping our head high and be proud of our well nurtured culture and traditions, which has been passed on to the successive generations by our ancestors. Only the passage of time will reveal the necessity of such manuals, which help us to know about our country and people.

By publishing the district manual of Ramanathapuram district, a commendable work has been completed. It is all the more commendable since it contains detailed information about the district and its people. I am sure that this manual will be of immense help to the rulers and people who are involved in welfare projects and research work.

-M. Karunanidhi

14.06.1972

The above cited literary and historical evidences prove the existence and the greatness of ‘Rama Sethu’, which are acceptable to even today’s politicians. Once knowing its greatness it becomes a necessity to take all steps to protect it.