

# HISTORY OF AN ISLAND CONNECTED WITH MAINLAND – A STUDY

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**Abstract:** This article is a humble attempt to study about the radical changes in geographical structure by a strong storm in the southern most part of India. The storm was the cause for the formation of sixteen new islands. Among these, Rameswaram Island only has dwelling places. As Rameswaram island was detached from the main land, where the people suffered a lot for transport and other purposes. During the eighteenth century A.D., the island was under the direct rule of Sethupathi of Ramanathapuram; they arranged a ferry service for connecting the island with the main land. When the island came under the British rule, it was connected with the main land by a train bridge in the first quarter of the twentieth century A.D. After India got freedom, Rameswaram Island was connected with the main land by a road bridge. The train and road transport paved way for creating many changes and development in the socio-economic life of the people of Rameswaram Island.

**Keyword:** Rameswaram island, the reign of Sethupathis of Ramanathapuram, British rule, TamilNadu, Government of India, Road transport, Railway.

## INTRODUCTION:

### Prologue

In 1480 A.D. a great storm strongly attacked the southernmost part of south India. Consequently a huge part of this land especially, the sea shore in the Bay of Bengal in the South Eastern side was swallowed by sea erosion. Besides, here and there high full lands were completely detached from the main land and these lands were surrounded by the sea water. So these lands became separate island and after the cyclone of 1480 A.D there was created sixteen new islands.

These sixteen islands had no dwelling place for human beings and these islands were not connected with the main land except Rameswaram island. Rameswaram Island has lot of dwelling places for human beings from the hoary past. It was connected with the main land permanently after the entry of the British in India. This article explains about how the mainland becomes as many as sixteen separate islands and how Rameswaram island gets connected with the main land again. These are all revealed under the headings of geographical background of Rameswaram island, history of road development in Rameswaram island, history of railway development, Schreyer Lift Bridge, Pamban viaduct and Ferry service in Rameswaram port.

### GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Rameswaram Island is situated in Ramanathapuram district, Tamil Nadu, South India. The whole island is a separate taluk. Rameswaram is the headquarters of the Taluk. (9010' and 90 20' North longitudes and 29012' and 79025' East longitudes). The whole island has an area of 188.4 square kilometers. It is located 43 kilometers away from the east of Ramanathapuram, 150 kilometers from

Madurai, 272 kilometers from Palani, 302 kilometers from Thanjavur, 381 kilometers from Coimbatore and 644 kilometers from Chennai. According to the Census Report – 2001, the total population of the island was nearly about 68778 (Male – 35436 and Female – 33342).

The main land extends up to Mandapam in the Ramanathapuram District. The island is surrounded by the Bay of Bengal. It is separated from the main land by the Pamban Canal, which extends between Mandapam and Pamban. The island starts from Pamban situated on the western side of the Rameswaram island. The island is connected with the main land by two Bridges. One is Pamban Viaduct Scherzer Train Bridge, another one is Road Bridge. The bridge, named after Indira Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India was opened on 2nd October 1988. These two bridges were constructed in Pamban Canal between Mandapam and Pamban. Indira Gandhi road bridge is connected with National Highways No.49 which passes through via Pamban, Thangachimadam, Rameswaram and Dhanuskodi and the train bridge is connected with Pamban railway station. New railway line is extended up to Rameswaram via Thangachimadam.

The whole island is divided into one town panchayat. Rameswaram is the headquarters for the Rameswaram Town Panchayat. Pamban and Thangachimadam are the headquarters for the Pamban Panchayat and Thangachimadam Panchayat. Respectively Rameswaram Town Panchayat comprises of the following villages and hamlets such as Rameswaram, Dhanushkodi, Ramakrishnapuram, Pudur, Karaiyur, Sudukattan Patti, OlaiKuda, Sambai, Mankadu, Gandhamadhanaparvatham, Vadakadu, Thiechithar Kollai, Kattupillayar Koil, Atthikadu, Semmamadam, Sallimalai, Thenkuda, Notchivadi, Narikuli,

Kilakadu, Aththikadu, Verkottu alias Verkodu, Earakadu.

Thangachimadam Panchayat comprises of the following villages and hamlets such as Thangachimadam, Thanneer ootru, Peikarumbu, Ariyar kundru, Meyyampuli, Verkadu, Nalupanai. Pamban Panchayat comprises of the following villages and hamlets such as Pamban, Akkal madam, Kundukal, Pananthoppu, Therkuvadi. Rameswaram island was under Ramanathapuram taluk up to 1982. Thereafter the whole Rameswaram island was made as a separate taluk. Rameswaram became the headquarter of the taluk.

### Etymology

Mostly the name of the villages in Rameswaram island including Dhanuskodi are said to be associated with the epic Ramayana. The place name Rameswaram is a combination of two words Rama and Iswaram. Lord Rama, the hero of Ramayana, created Iswara in sand in the form of Linga, a symbol of Lord Siva and worshipped it. According to Ramayana, Ravana, the king of Srilanka, abducted Sita, the wife of Lord Rama. Rama invaded Srilanka and killed him. While returning to Rameswaram with Sita, Rama was advised by holy men to create a Linga in sand and worship it to purge himself of the sin of brahmahatya (Brahminicide).

Consequently, Rama fixed an auspicious time to worship the Linga. He sent Hanuman to Mount Kailas to collect the Linga. But Hanuman could not come within the auspicious time. Therefore, Sita installed a Linga made up of sand on the coast of Rameswaram, which was worshipped by Rama. That Linga is called as Ramalinga or Ramanatha or Rameswara. So, this place is known as Rameswaram and the whole island is also called after the name. The island of Rameswaram is in the shape of a bow and is called Rama's bow. Each end is called 'kodi' which means 'tip' of the 'bow'. The name 'Thanus' in Sanskrit means 'bow' and 'kodi' in Tamil means 'tip' i.e. tip of the bow. Dhanuskodi is also called as Sethu, which means a bridge on causeway. It is a place where Lord Rama constructed the causeway to reach Sri Lanka. The story goes that Lord Rama returned from Srilanka and destroyed the bridge with his bows.

### HISTORY OF ROAD DEVELOPMENT

Those who come to Rameswaram from various parts of the country should first come to Ramanathapuram. Then they reach Rameswaram island through Utchipuli, Mandapam camp and Mandapam. Right from olden days, Rameswaram was linked with important cities and towns. Transport facility was developed for the benefit of the pilgrims and tourists who wanted to see Rameswaram and Dhanuskodi. The historical records of Sri Lanka state that there was an important roadway between Rameswaram and Madurai. Lankapura Dhantanayaka, the Military General of Srilanka (1167 A.D.) first came to Rameswaram and then he reached Madurai with his army through Rameswaram, Paramakudi, Parthipanoor and Thirupachethi and defeated Kulasekara pandya, the then ruler of Madurai.

In 1311 A.D, Malik Kafer, the Military General of Delhi Sultanate defeated Sundara Pandya, the ruler of Madurai. Then his army reached Rameswaram through land route. In 1480 A.D., the land from Pamban to Dhanuskodi

was cut off from the mainland due to a violent storm. Thereafter, the places that were situated from Pamban to Dhanuskodi, including Thangachimadam and Rameswaram became a separate island. Rani Mangammal (1684 A.D – 1706 A.D.), the ruler of Madurai laid a road from Madurai to Mandapam and Pamban to Rameswaram. The travelers to Rameswaram and Dhanuskodi reached Pamban by boat and then continued their journey by walking through Mangammal road.

### SETHUPATHI'S OF RAMANATHAPURAM

During Muthu Vijaya Regunatha Sethupathi's period (1710 AD to 1720 A.D.) a fort was built at Pamban for the safety of Rameswaram island. A part of the army was stationed there for security. Thanda Deva was appointed as the general for the security force. He wanted to improve the land route from Pamban to Dhanuskodi via Thangachimadam and Rameswaram. So, he decided to collect a fund. According to his plan, he collected two Salli from (per head) pilgrims and others including travellers who rode on boats between Mandapam, Thonithuri and Pamban. By using this fund, he laid the road from Pamban to Dhanuskodi through Thangachimadam and Rameswaram. To make this road he brought rectangular size stones from the hill outside Rameswaram island and used them.

### BRITISH RULE

Under the rule of the British in 1838, the road facilities were improved. The primary aim of the British Government was to extend the roads in Ramanathapuram district in 1843 A.D. Later many important roads were laid to reach Ramanathapuram.

### ROADS WERE LAID :

- i. from Tanjore to Ramanathapuram through Kottai Pattinam, Sunthara Pandya Pattinam and Thondi.
- ii. from Trichirapalli and Ramanathapuram through Pudhukottai and Raja Singa Mangalam.
- iii. from Tichy to Ramanathapuram through Manamadurai and Paramakudi.
- iv. from Madurai to Ramanathapuram through Manamadurai and Paramakudi.
- v. from Ramanathapuram to Thiruchuzhi through Aviyur.
- vi. from Madurai to Ramanathapuram, Via Thiruchuzhi and Kamuthi.
- vii. between Ramanathapuram and Thirunelveli through Keelchevanur.
- viii. between Devipattinam and Mandapam Thonithurai and from Pamban to Rameswaram without any break.

In 1866 A.D., seven important roads were constructed. One among them was constructed between Ramanathapuram and Mandapam Thonithurai. At the same time a road was also laid between Ramanathapuram and Karaikudi. In 1869, a road was laid from Mandapam Thonithurai to Palakad (Kerala) through Ramanathapuram-Srivilliputhur by-pass. This route joined Rameswaram with Kerala. In 1873 A.D., road from Pamban to Rameswaram was developed with the money collected from pilgrims and tourists coming to Rameswaram. In 1945 the roadways

between Madurai and Ramanathapuram were converted as National Highways. After Independence in 1947, the First Five year Plan (1952-1957) was implemented. During this period the National Highways was extended upto Mandapam. Later, during the Second Five year Plan (1962-67), the road was further extended to Dhanuskodi as National Highways No.49. It is now extended between Dhanuskodi and Kumily in the Tamilnadu – Kerala border, passing through Ramanathapuram, Madurai and Theni. Yet the sea was at a length of 2.2. kilometre between Mandapam and Pamban. So till 1988, there was no road transport. Those who wanted to go to Rameswaram have to depend on railways alone.

### **PAMBAN BRIDGE**

The National Highway No.49 from Madurai to Dhanuskodi pier is now connected by the bridge constructed across Pamban strait. To meet the increasing demand of the pilgrims and the people of Rameswaram, the Government of India has accorded a sanction to construct this bridge. Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India (1972-1977) laid the foundation stone for this bridge on 19th September 1973. The work was commenced in November 1974 and was completed in September 1988. It was opened on 2nd October 1988. The average pilgrim and tourist visit to this island is about 10 lakhs per annum. The island possesses a large quantity of lime stone and coral deposits. The construction of this bridge not only boost the economic status of the people but also help the uninterrupted traffic of this island. The road bridge has been constructed 51.82 metres south of the existing bridge. The length of the road bridge is 2345 metres and it is the first bridge of this kind over the sea in India.

This bridge provides uninterrupted movement for the ships along the Pamban strait by providing a navigable span of about 115 metre with a vertical clearance of 16.754 metre as in the case of Railway bridge where a Scherzer lift span has been provided with a vertical clearance of 16.754 meter. The Pamban strait is one of the most aggressive saline coastal areas in the world. The chloride content in the Pamban atmosphere is in the order of 4300 milligram per metre per day and it reacts quickly and largely on the steel in the bridge and corrosion takes place. High humidity in the area also helps to accelerate the formation of rust. Hence anticorrosive measures were taken to prevent corrosion. Only mild steel reinforcement was used. The steel reinforcement used for the construction work was treated anti-corrosive solution and then used in the construction. Only sulphate resistant cement was used for structures below sea and for monitoring the corrosion, a device called probe was installed in the concrete as per the advice of the CECRI (Central Electro Chemical Research Institute), Karaikudi. It has also proposed to give anti-corrosive paint to the entire bridge structure.

The road bridge was built with 79 spans (pillars). It has a total length of 2345 metres. It has a clear carriage way of 7.5 metres and foot path of 1.50 metres on either side of the navigation and the clearance is 16.76 metre from high tide level. It was built in the total cost of 19.98 crores. Out of this amount, only 18.47 crore rupees was spent to construct the

main bridge and the remaining amount of 1.51 crore rupees was spent to construct the approaches of the bridge. The main bridge was constructed by two private constructors at first called Nilakandan and Brothers Private limited Madras. They were unable to finish the work within the time limit and so their contract was cancelled by the Government. Then the contract rights were given to Managing and Service of Cammon India Private Limited, Bombay and the later completed the work. This bridge was opened by Rajiv Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India on October 2nd 1988 and it was named as Annai Indira Gandhi Road bridge.

### **Village roads**

The main National Highways No.49 was laid down from Pamban to Dhanuskodi via Thangachimadam and Rameswaram. Many small villages of this island joined the national Highways No. 49. These roads often got damages and now these roads are changed into tar roads.

### **Growth of Vehicle Transportation**

In the beginning, the people living in Rameswaram island reached one place from the other by walking or by using bullock carts. From 1908 Railways helped the people to reach places like Pamban, Thangachimadam, Rameswaram and Dhanuskodi. The People of the interior villages did not get any benefit from the Railways. During this period, people used bullock carts to bring the goods from villages to the station. The tourists who reached Rameswaram used horse carriages and rickshaws to go to the various pilgrim and tourist centres in the island. In 1964 Dhanuskodi was destroyed by a cyclone and Train transport was totally stopped. So people used horse carriages to go to Dhanuskodi.

From 1975, Government of TamilNadu provided steamer boats to the fishermen at a low rate of interest with subsidiary. Therefore several fuel centres were started in the island. Then Auto rickshaws were brought down through trains and used for local transportation. In the year 1977, Government of TamilNadu decided to operate city buses within Rameswaram. A branch of Tamil Nadu Transport Corporation was established at Mahavir choultry near the Railway station at Rameswaram. The buses were brought down to the island by train. On 9th July 1977, Tamil Nadu Transport corporation operated first city bus M.T.A No.8033 from Rameswaram railway station to Pamban.

The buses were operated from Ramanathaswami Temple at Rameswaram and Thangachimadam. Some buses operated even in the night from Rameswaram Railway station to Sri Ramanathaswami temple. Some buses were also run from Verkottu at Rameswaram to Pamban and they run through Thangachimadam. The bus service was started between Ramanathaswami Temple at Rameswaram and Dhanuskodi on 4th December 1982. Because of the opening of the way bridge at Pamban, a number of tourist and route buses operated in Rameswaram.

The number of tourists increased considerably. Due to the increase of buses, the construction of a new bus stand was started. M. Karunanithi, the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu laid the foundation stone for the new bus stand on 4th July 1989. The work was completed in 2000 and the

bus stand was dedicated to the public usage on 13th December 2000 on the same day Ko.C.Mani the then Home Minister of Tamil Nadu declared open the New Bus Stand. Buses are running to Sambai, Mankadu and Ariyargundu from Rameswaram. From Pamban, the city buses are run to Therkuvadi and Kundukal. The city buses are also from Rameswaram to Vethalai through Mandapam and reached Vethalai. Because of the growth of the city buses, the usage of rickshaws, bullock carts and horse carriages has receded.

### **HISTORY OF RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT**

In the year 1872, the South India Railway Company laid down the railway-lines from Madras to Trichi for the first time. In the same year, it decided to extend the lines to Tuticorin. The South Indian Railway Company in association with Karnataka Railway company formed a new company called South India Railway company. This railway company extended the rail lines from Chennai to Tuticorin. The lines ran through Vadamalai Kurinji near Thirunelveli and reached Tuticorin. These rail lines are the first ones to pass through Ramanathapuram district (old Ramanathapuram). Now this area is located in Virudhunagar district.

Later, new rail lines were laid down from Madurai up to Mandapam passing through Manamadurai, paramakudi and Ramanathapuram on 1st August 1902 A.D. Thereafter in 1906 A.D., one more new railway line was laid down from Pamban to Rameswaram through Thangachimadam with Railway stations at Pamban, Thangachimadam and Rameswaram. In this route the rail transport began on 1st September 1906 A.D. As a result, the pilgrims first started their journey from Mandapam to Pamban by boat, and from there they took their journey by train to reach Rameswaram. This facility helped them to reach Rameswaram alone.

Those who wanted to reach Dhanuskodi had to reach the place by walk for a distance of 18 kilometers. So new rail line was laid down from Rameswaram Puthu road to Dhanuskodi harbour. The train went through the line on 10th December 1908 A.D. In the end of the year 1908, railway transport was initiated from Rameswaram, Pamban to Dhanuskodi. As there was sea between Mandapam and Pamban, the rail transport was delayed in that region. The plan and survey for the rail transport in this region was taken by the British Government in 1876 A.D. According to this plan a bridge was constructed from Mandapam to Pamban passing the sea and it ran upto a distance of 2.5 kilometers. On 24th February 1914 A.D., the bridge was opened for transport thus enabling the pilgrims and tourists to travel from Madurai to Dhanuskodi.

The pilgrims had to reach Sethu Theertham (holy water) in Dhanuskodi by walk for a distance of 1 kilometer. So a new railway line was constructed from Dhanuskodi harbour to Sethu Theertham. Trains were started between Dhanuskodi and Sethu theertham and people could travel from Madras to Rameswaram and Dhanuskodi in trains. On 31st October 1927 one more railway line was laid down from Pamban to Rameswaram Road (puthu road) via South Coast of Rameswaram island, it was laid down covering a distance of 6.77 miles. It never connected Thangachimadam with Pamban and Rameswaram. It was a short route to

Dhanuskodi from Pamban.

Railway journey from Dhanuskodi to Chennai via Madurai increased and developed. Further a new railway line was also constructed from Manamadurai to Pudukottai. This new route was opened on 1st July 1930. People could travel from Chennai to Dhanuskodi through Manamadurai and Puthukottai instead of passing through Madurai. By this new route they could save time and money. The Manamadurai Railway Station was promoted as Manamadurai Railway Junction.

On the night of 22nd December 1964 A.D., Dhanuskodi was attacked and destroyed completely by tempest. A passenger train submerged into the sea and many lives were lost. Because of this disaster, rail transport was stopped. Now the traces of the railway lines are seen here in a few places in Dhanuskodi and Rameswaram.

The Railway department met with a heavy loss with the opening of the Pamban Road Bridge. Later the railway stations Thangachimadam and other stations were closed. Now in the Rameswaram island, Railway stations are seen only in Rameswaram and Pamban. Moreover, the rail lines connecting Rameswaram with important places are in meter gauge. Later, the Government of India decided to change meter gauge into broad gauge. The work was started on 16th July 2006 and it was completed in the year 2007. Due to this reason rail transport in this island was stopped from 15th July 2006 to 11th August 2007. During this period, transportation took place through Pamban road bridge.

The Department of Indian Railways made a decision to construct broad gauge line from Mandapam and from Pamban to Rameswaram. Then the department converted the meter gauge into broad gauge on the bridge at a cost of Rs. 50 Crores. It removed the meter gauge line and constructed a broad gauge line by using pillars. On 12th August 2007, train ran on the new broad gauge lines. Sonia Gandhi, the then President of the Indian National Congress inaugurated the rail transportation in this route. The inauguration function was held in Madurai. Lalu Prasad Yadav the then Railway Minister and M. Karunanithi the then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister participated in the function.

### **PAMBAN VIADUCT**

The Pamban Railway Bridge popularly known as Pamban Viaduct was constructed between Mandapam and Pamban. The question of opening a rail communication between India and Srilanka was under consideration from 1876 onwards. In 1910 A.D., sanction was given to the proposal for bridging the Pamban pass. Several schemes were considered but in 1911 A.D., it was finally decided to build an over bridge in sea and it was to be built with lift bridge over the palk strait to provide a ferry service between Dhanuskodi (Rameswaram island) and Talai mannar (Srilanka).

The Pamban viaduct is 6740 feet long and consists of 145 spans of 40 feet steel girders with a clearance of 214 feet leaf Scherzer rolling lift bridge spanning of Pamban pass. All the stone and concrete metal used for the bridge were brought by train from a quarry 170 miles away from Rameswaram. Sand for building purpose, not being procurable locally, was railed from a place 70 miles away

from Rameswaram. Work was begun in June 1911 A.D., and the last pier was completed in May 1913 A.D. During this period, work had to be closed down for about six months owing to the storms and rough weather during the north east monsoon. The Scherzer bridge in the viaduct was built in 18 months. The Scherzer bridge construction work was begun in July 1913 A.D. and completed in December of the same year.

### **SCHERZER LIFT BRIDGE**

The famous Viaduct is 2065.32 meter long consisting of 146 spans of steel girders of which 143 spans of 12.19 metre long, 2 nos. of 12.10 metre long and 1 lift span of 65.23 meter. This lift span is named after Scherzer, who designed and executed the bascule of this span. This Scherzer bridge span is known as 'Pamban Pass'. This lift span is used for allowing the ships and steamer. Small steamers and merchant vessels were allowed to pass through the strait. At that spot, a bridge of 214 feet long was constructed. It has two leaves which are lifted for the passage of vessels and they are lowered for the passage of trains. This is called as the Scherzer Rolling lift bridge. Normally, it is lowered for the passage of trains and it is opened only when required during special occasions.

The Port Officer of Pamban controls the passage of vessels, and he orders the operator to lift the bridge through telephone communication. The bridge-operator, on receipt of his information, communicates with the station masters in Pamban and Mandapam. The station masters on either end will accord permission only if the line is free. On receipt of the permission, the operator will bring the king lever to the mid position, and then the station masters will give a prolonged beat on their respective block instruments. The mid-position of the king lever cuts off the block line and communication on either side of the respective polarised relay takes place in the cabin.

The polarised relay circuits is closed by the prolonged beat, which is necessary to give time for the operator to move the king lever from mid to reverse position directing the needle to the right. Local conduct in the relay, close the lock circuit which, when energised, releases the king lever so that it can be brought to the reverse position, thus disconnecting the above mentioned circuits. The king lever releases the mechanical lever which in turn releases the lock, thus enabling the bridge levers to the lift up. After the passage of the vessel, the bridge levers are lowered down and brought to normal position to enable train transport.

### **CO-ORDINATION BETWEEN THE RAILWAY AND THE STEAMER SERVICE**

Dhanuskodi is a terminus in the Southern Railway. A regular ferry steamer service connects the train with the port of Talai mannar in Srilanka. The Indo-Srilankan Boat Mail connected to Dhanuskodi with Madras and the Srilankan Government Railway connects Talaimannar with Colombo city. The ferry steamers take about 2 hours to cross the sea between Talaimannar and Dhanuskodi. This port is very important since this is a gate way from India to Srilanka. The trade is mostly with Srilanka. The chief articles among imported goods are nuts, sugar, coconuts, machinery, tea,

raw hides and skins, spices, empty jute, gunny bags and oil seeds. The bulk of the export trade consists of rice, onion, cotton, salted fish, tea, coffee, oil cakes, bones and bone meal, vegetables and fish manure.

At Mandapam camp station, the passengers bound for Srilanka are examined regarding the possession of passport, visa, health certificates and income tax exemption certificate. In the case of foreigners, it is checked whether they had stayed in India more than ninety days. There after the passengers are allowed to proceed to Dhanuskodi where the custom examination is done. After all these examinations, the passengers are allowed to travel to Srilanka. The Southern Railway maintains two steamers namely T.S.S. Irwin and T.S.S. Goschen for running the ferry service between Dhanuskodi and Talai Mannar. The distance between Talaimannar and Dhanuskodi is only 21 miles. The ferry services are controlled by the Marine Superintendent at Mandapam and the steamers are controlled by the Marine superintendent in Mandapam. .

Usually the running time for the steamers is two hours. During storms, the trips are cancelled. Each steamer is capable of carrying about 500 passengers. The ferry services are run for three days in a week from Dhanuskodi to Talai mannar.

### **FERRY SERVICE IN RAMESWARAM PORT**

Ferry Service in Rameswaram port had been catering to the needs of passengers travelling between Rameswaram and Talai mannar and it was operated by the Shipping Corporation of India. Before 1964, this service was operated between Dhanuskodi and Talaimannar. On 22nd December 1964 Dhanuskodi port was destroyed by a heavy cyclone. So the service was shifted from Dhanuskodi port to Rameswaram port. This service was also stopped from 8th January 1985, due to ethnic problems in Sri Lanka. At present, there is no transport activity in this port. However the Government of India has come forward to explore the possibility of developing an integrated port facility that comprises cargo handling facilities, fishing harbour and flotilla facilities for Sethu Samuthiram Corporation limited.

### **CONCLUSION**

Rameswaram Island is extended for an area of 188.4 square kilometers. This island has about one lakh population. Fishery is the main occupation along with tourism, prohitham, jasmine and betel cultivation, fancy conch manufacturing and sales are the other important occupation of the people of Rameswaram island. Up to the third quarter of the fifteenth century this island was part and parcel of the mainland. After 1480 A.D. it was separated from the mainland by a great storm. So the people of Rameswaram island suffered to make a journey from Pamban to Mandapam because they have to cross the Palk strait (Bay of Bengal Sea). So, Sethupathis of Ramanathapuram arranged a ferry service (Parisal alias country boat) between Mandapam and Pamban and they laid road by stones from Pamban to Dhanuskodi in 18th Century A.D. After the rule of the Sethupathis this island came under the rule of the British and they started train service from different parts of the mainland

up to Mandapam and they started machine boat service from Mandapam to Pamban. The train service again continued from Pamban to Dhanushkodi via Rameswaram in 1906.

There was no train service because the Palk Strait stood as the main hurdle. It was very inconvenient to the public and the government administrative body. So the Government of British India decided to construct a bridge in Palk Strait for train service. This work was started in June 1911 and it came to an end in December 1913. Consequently, the train service started on 24th February 1914 through the railway bridge between Mandapam and Pamban. As a result, this island was connected with mainland for the first time through this bridge. It is a notable bridge in India because, when a small size ship crosses the Palk Strait the train service would be stopped between Mandapam and Pamban, and then the lift bridge would be opened to give way to the ship. After the ship crosses the lift bridge it would be closed and it comes to the normal position and the train service would be continued.

This island has a vital role in the earning of foreign exchange through fishing industry, especially by exporting some fish items like lobsters and prawns, seaweeds and conches. And also this island is not only a holy place for the Hindus but also a famous tourist destination and this island attracts tourists from all over the world. So, transport facilities other than the train service are needed. As a result, the government of India decided to construct a road bridge on Palk Strait between Mandapam and Pamban very parallel to train bridge. The work for the Pamban over bridge was started in November 1974 and was completed in 1988. It was opened for public transport on 2nd October 1988. Consequently, Rameswaram Island was connected once again by road mark. This bridge is also constructed in a way for the small size ships to pass.

Once the region between Pamban to Dhanushkodi was a part of the main land. However it was bifurcated by a natural calamity in 1480 A.D. and as a result, this region became a separate island. But due to the efforts of human beings it was connected back with the mainland. Now, the people of Rameswaram island feel happy that they live in the mainland itself. And, this is made possible because of the hard work and knowledge of human beings.

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