

In 1956, the SRC had suggested that the predominantly Malayalam speaking populations of Laccadive and Minicoy Islands under Malabar district, and Amindivi Islands of the South Canara district (both in the erstwhile Madras state) should be integrated with new linguistic state of Kerala. However, the islands were detached from their respective districts and established as a new Union Territory with a population of just twenty one thousand (census 1951) for administrative purposes. The district of Malabar was made part of Kerala and South Canara (Dakshin Kannada) was attached to Karnataka.

Meanwhile, a referendum was held in Minicoy in 1956 as this island was directly under the Crown, and only notionally attached to Malabar district for purposes of administration. This is how the islands of Laccadive, Minicoy, and Amindivi became a Union Territory (UT) in 1956. In 1973, the islands were renamed Lakshadweep, although the first Hindi Map of India in 1952 had also referred to the islands by this name. It must be mentioned here that while the Amindivi group of islands had been under the control of Tipu Sultan, the Laccadive group (Kavaratti, Agatti, and Andrott) were under the Arakkals. Minicoy is situated mid-way between Indian and Maldives, and the language of this island (Divehi) appears to be closer to Divehi, rather than Malayalam. This Minicoy islands is the farthest island outpost of India.

There were two possible reasons for placing these islands directly under the Union government. The stated reason was of course the long term naval interest in the region, about which KM Pannikar started articulating his concerns from the time of India's independence. However, another plausible and more direct reason was the lurking fear of a possible Communist regime in Kerala, and the Union government was paranoid about the implications of a red flag on any of the islands.

The literal meaning of Lakshadweep is "one hundred thousand islands" in *Sanskrit, Malayalam and Marathi*. However, in that historical context, where Bharat Varsha was a part of Jambu Dweep, Lakshadweep included the archipelagos of Maldives and the Chagos, a British Overseas territory which includes the US Naval base Diego Garcia .The

Islands have long been known to sailors, as indicated in an anonymous reference from the first century AD by Periplus. The islands were also mentioned in the Buddhist Jataka stories of the sixth century BC. Islam was established in the region when Muslims arrived around the seventh century. During the medieval period, the region was ruled by the Chola dynasty and Kingdom of Cannanore. The Catholic Portuguese arrived around 1498 but were expelled by 1545. The region was then ruled by the Muslim house of Arakkal, who had to cede some areas to Tipu Sultan. By the early part of the nineteenth century, most of the region passed on to the British, though for all practical purposes, the islanders were left to fend for themselves. Amini, Kalpeni Andrott, Kavaratti and Agatti are the oldest inhabited islands.

Before November 1956, the administration in the islands was only nominal and the trade to mainland was done in boats called 'odams'. The islanders traded fish, copra and coir in exchange for rice, salt and other essentials.

Lakshadweep's first representation to the Indian Parliament was on the basis of nomination. From 1956 to 1967, the MP was K. Nalla Koya Thangal who served two terms. This seat is reserved for Scheduled Tribes, and is the smallest Lok Sabha constituency by number of voters.

The first elections were held in 1967 and P. M. Sayeed went on to win the next ten elections consecutively. He was first elected to Lok Sabha in 1967 at the age of twenty six. He served as Union Minister of State for Steel, Coal and Mines (1979–1980), Home Affairs (1993–1995) and Information and Broadcasting (1995–1996). He was the Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha from 1998–2004. The credit for initiating most of the development interventions in the islands, including the establishment of the Island Development authority, introduction of air services, linkages with Nafed for the procurement of copra and modernisation of ports and fishing goes to him.

Another milestone in the history of Lakshadweep was the shifting of the headquarters from Cochin to Kavaratti on 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1964. Once the 'Administrator' started staying in the Islands, the progress was substantial, and gradually government infrastructure, especially schools and hospitals came up in all the inhabited islands. Interventions in the health sector are specially commendable and noteworthy, as leprosy was a major issue in the islands. Administrators like Omesh Saigal helped in the ensuring regularity in transport and communication services. His book on Lakshadweep, published by the NBT helped bridge the information gap about the islands.

Today, Lakshadweep has the second highest literacy rate in the country, and women are not far behind men in this accomplishment. In terms of HDI, Lakshadweep is fourth in the country, just behind Kerala, Chandigarh and Goa, and above the NCT of Delhi!

NITI has recently drawn up strategy paper *Transforming the Islands through Creativity & Innovation* for the development of Lakshadweep islands with focus on sustainable eco-tourism and fishing as the key economic drivers in the islands, and over the next decade, these Islands will actually be exemplars of how development interventions ought to be made!