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## “MADURAI NAYAK’S INSCRIPTIONS FROM A.D 1529 TO A.D 1736 A STUDY”

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### ABSTRACT:

The relics of the past reveal the development of human life over time and space. As the study of the achievements of the people of the past, enables the people of the present, to inspire and inform the changes in the life of humanity, to the succeeding generations. The past lies around us everywhere in this society. The study of inscriptions reveals the beauty, purity and intellectual thoughts of humanity. Under such a pretext it will be apt to have an analysis of the distinctive features of the Nayaks of Madurai. One of the last glorious kingdoms in the history of Tamilnadu was of the Nayaks, which existed for over a period of 200 years, beginning from the rise of Visvanatha Nayak in 1529 A.D to the decline of Rani Meenakshi in 1736 A.D. The emergence of their rule in Madurai was a major event in the Tamil history because it witnessed the revival of activities and achievement of manifold glories in various fields. Nayak rulers introduced Poligar system. By that army generals were enjoyed status and rights to collect taxes to maintain peace and order. The Telugu army generals were called as Nayaks. They patronized Hinduism and brought glory and fame to Madurai. All activities in Madurai kingdom reached its high water mark under the Nayaks of Madurai. Nayaks preserved and allowed the native customs along with their traditions. Nayak kingdom remained centre of unity and tolerance. Inscriptions reveal that people of Madurai Nayak period enjoyed a high level of intelligence, building, irrigation works, education, technology, donated villages and lands, remission of tax, performed pujas, and castes. Epigraphic records estimates that Nayak rulers were benevolent, orthodox and conservatives and philanthropists. The study of Inscriptions is needed to learn more about Nayaks rule and their benevolent activities in the society.



**KEYWORDS:** Education, Tour, Justice, Poligar System, Canals, Land grants, Pooja, Caste System, Decentralized System.

### INTRODUCTION

A study on Inscriptional sources about Madurai Nayaks is essential as it reveals the real nature of the society of Madurai Nayaks period. Madurai, Athens of South India had hoary antiquity and flourished under Pandyan kings.

After havoc, anarchy and disorder created by Alaudin Khiliji's general Malik Kafur, death knell of Pandyas was rang.<sup>1</sup> By that Madurai sultanate was established in 1335 A.D., under Jaluluddin Hassanshah. Then Madurai

engulfed with anarchy and disorder which leads to set back in political, Social, Cultural and Economic. Later Kumara Kampana, the Vijayanagar prince deposed Sultan Fakhruddin Mubarakshah from Madurai throne and

incorporated Madurai kingdom with Vijayanagar Empire in 1378 A.D.<sup>2</sup> During Sultanate period except the two shrines of Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi, the building surrounding the deities was collapsed along with art and sculpture.<sup>3</sup> Once Madurai came under Vijayanagar kings and subsequently under the rule of the Nayak kings, it was rescued from ravages of catastrophes and protected the city. They constructed many temples and renovated it. They gave gifts, grants to temples and its authorities. They encouraged Telugu people and various occupational holders to accommodate in Madurai kingdom. By that many new villages and settlements came into existence. The real history of Nayaks and their society are known from the various inscriptions.

## 2. AIMS/OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The interpretation about the study of Inscriptions during Madurai Nayaks from A.D 1529 to A.D 1736 would prove that the studying inscription is an interesting one. This paper derives the following objectives. They are

- To analyse Inscriptions on Nayak rulers tours
- To emphasis Inscriptions on free education
- To assess the Inscriptions on fair justice
- To highlight the significance of Inscriptions on Poligar system
- To imbibe the students of History to understand the Inscriptions on canals and tanks
- To through light on Inscriptions on Land grants
- It also aims to highlight the Pooja through Inscriptions
- To bring out more information's on Inscriptions on Devadana and Brahmadeya lands
- To analyse Inscriptions on caste system
- Highlighting the various Inscriptions on decentralized system of administration

## 3. CONCEPT FRAMEWORK:

An intellectual activity of human being always makes history. History lies around us like in the form of objects, monuments, habits, cultures and traditions. These were taken to the world through the sources like Archaeological, Literary and Monuments. These sources are abundant in this society. Inscriptional sources reveal the exact nature of particular society. But these sources are still needed to study to explicit the history of that particular period. Attempts to study these inscriptions are less in number. So it is an important to put an attempt to study to reveal history of Madurai Nayaks. Hence this study of inscription is essential and assumes a special attention at this present context.

## 4. RESEARCH QUESTION:

How the inscriptions reveal the real history of Madurai Nayaks during A.D 1529 to A.D 1736 A.D.

## 5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The complete study concentrates facts based on both primary and secondary sources. With esteem to the primary sources, the inscriptions and epigraphic records of the contemporary period are consulted. Many archaeological and literary sources are containing many facts related with the theme taken up for study. Primary sources like **The Annual Report on Epigraphy, Indian Antiquary Volumes, and List of antiquities, Mysore Archaeological Reports, Oriental Historical Manuscripts, South Indian Inscriptions Volumes, and Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency Volumes, Epigraphia Indica, and The Madras Epigraphist's Report** gave enough sources related with topic. All these sources are specified a due abode in footnotes. In accumulation to the overhead, the altered published letters and letters of the Missionaries of the contemporary period too are occupied into justification as primary sources.

Away from the above primary or original sources, numerous secondary sources are also consulted. Renowned scholars such as R.Caldwell's **Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages**, Robert Sewell's **Forgotten Empire**, R.SathyanathaAiyar's **History of the**

**Nayaks of Madurai**, A.Edgar Thurston's **Castes and Tribes of South India** K.Paranthamanar's **NayakkarVaralaru**(in Tamil), K.Rajayyan's **History of Madurai**, and **Rise and fall of Poligars of Tamil Nadu**, J.H.Nelson's **Madurai Country Manual**, A.Krishnaswamy's **Tamil Country under Vijayanagar**, Somalay's **Madurai Mavattam** T.V.Mahalingam's **Administration and Social Life under Vijayanagar**, and **History of Tinnevely**, Burton Stein's **Vijayanagar**, B.K. Gokhale's **Political Science**, S.Clement's **Main Currents of Vijayanagar History**,(in Tamil), etc., are followed to write this paper.

## 7. METHODOLOGY:

An analytical and a descriptive Research Methodology is adopted with the honest use of inscriptions, epigraphy, literature, archaeological reports, copper plates information, private collections and other published works. A critical and narrative methods and interview with related personalities also be applied.

### Inscriptions on Nayak rulers tours:

The Nayaks rulers had aspiration to know about the people. So they made many tours. Thirumalai Nayak (1623-1659 A.D) and MuthuVirappaNayak III (1682-89 A.D.) were made continuous tour to know about the people.<sup>4</sup> During his tours, Thirumalai Nayak acknowledged worthy subjects and gave grants and gifts for their loyalty and trustworthy services. It is known from grants of rent free lands to Kaundan of Nallamaram for his trustworthy services and to SrirangaNayakkaandthe Chieftain of Vellikurichi for slaying tigers.<sup>5</sup> MuthuVirappaNayak III also adopted similar technique to supervise the functions of the local administration. Thus the Nayak kings enthusiastically established stable, orderly and systematic administrative machineries and curtailed the atrocities, unfair activities. So they brought unity and integrity in their territory. They followed benevolent policies, tolerant attitude and perseverance towards their subjects irrespective of language, caste, region and religion. By that the Nayak period shows the absence of internal rebellion or communal riots. It leads to maintain orderly society with peace and prosperity.<sup>6</sup>

### Inscriptions on Village grant:

Throughout the Nayak period we could find that several inscriptions speak about village grants. Inscriptions of KrishnappaNayak I dated 1563 A.D. reveals message regarding the references about the settlements. These settlements had the suffix, Kulam, namely Ariyakulam, Siramankulam etc. Village Krishnapuram was erected and formed agraharasfor the Brahmins and thereby distributed lands for occupation.<sup>7</sup> Thirumalai Nayak inscription dated 1638 A.D., remarks about tax imposed on village Pudukkulamnear Madurai, collected and was given to the temple. Another inscription of Thirumalai Nayak, dated 1648 A.D tell about land grants to sudra priest by Thirumalai Nayak. Numerous facts related with land grants known from Nayak's inscriptions.<sup>8</sup>

### Inscription on extension of territories:

Under the rule of Thirumalai Nayak, the Nayak country of Madurai was prolonged beyond the erstwhile Coimbatore District. The inscription of Thirumalai Nayak dated 1655 A.D. at Kannadiputtur near Coimbatore discloses the grant of lands to Brahmins by ThiurmalaiNayak. The literary evidences of the Christian missionaries too disclose that the Nayak Kingdom of Madurai was extended beyond Coimbatore.

### Inscriptions on free education:

Innumerable agraharaswere flourishing with the aids and gifts. Those agraharaswere centres of learning and especially religious education was informed. The subjects taught in those centres were Vedas, Hindu philosophy and rituals. As the Nayak rulers were staunch Hindus, they monitored an ancient Hindu educational policy joining religious and scientific studies and focused more on moral and right values. Their chief distinctive factor in the education arrangement was, that the state should

provide higher studies and the primary education was left to isolated individuals who conveyed education from home or by local organizations. Such an educational system allowed the Brahmins and upper class communities to learn, ethics, philosophy and principles of Hinduism.<sup>9</sup> They were keen on promoting Hinduism and encouraged the scholars of Sanskrit and gave adequate patronage to Brahmins, the custodians of Sanskrit learning and Vedas. The Nayaks made generous grants to mutts or religious centres or monasteries and temples, where free education was conveyed. The temples and mutts helped as champions of learning synthesis of culture and renewal of religious literature, during the Nayak age.<sup>10</sup> The grants and performances given to these religious organizations had Telugu words, found in Nayaks inscriptions. The inscriptions dated 1692 A.D. and 1698 A.D., had the Telugu words Madhurasamstanamanduvundi and Mangammagaru, instead the Tamil words Madurasamsthanam and Mangammal.

### **Inscriptions on fair justice:**

The Nayak Kings were perfect in providing fair justice to whomever under them. MuthuVirappaNayak III was most notable for his perfect morality and sincerity.<sup>11</sup> During his rule, land dispute between the Christians and Hindus was solved at Tiruchi.<sup>12</sup> He hands over the disputed land to Christians after he ordered for the removal of Hindu idols from that land. Nayak rulers always protect the interests of the minorities. The epigraphical records of KrishnappaNayak I, Rani Mangammal, VijayarangaChokkanathaNayak and Rani Meenakshi, reveal that they donated lands to Mosques.<sup>13</sup>

### **Inscription on Poligar system:**

Visvanatha Nayak the ruler of the Madurai Kingdom from 1529 A.D. to 1563 A.D. Though a vassal of Vijayanagar Empire, he acted independently and was vested with much administrative powers. He enjoyed even the power of remission of taxes and followed the policy of cooperation and conciliation with feudatory kings, especially with the Pandyas of Tenkasi in order to strengthen the kingdom.<sup>14</sup> The Krishnapuram Plates of Sadasiva reveal that he had the title Pandyakulastha panacharya.<sup>15</sup> That shows he would have retained cordial relations with the Pandya kings. As he was trained in the Vijayanagar imperial system he applied its principles in a systematic manner in Madurai. He familiarised the poligar system with the assistance of DalavayAriyanathaMudaliya. By that they maintained good administration in the Madurai country.<sup>16</sup>

### **Inscription on canals and tanks:**

Visvanatha Nayak was an interesting man with associate desirable character. His numerous reforms disclose his sense of public duty and generosity. He assumed many welfare schemes like fortifications, renovation of temples, clearing of jungles, promoting pilgrim's journey, mutts and buildings for the advance of the dominion.<sup>17</sup> The cities of Madurai, Trichinopoly and Tinnevely were enlarged and increased. For the advance of agriculture, he created canals within the rivers Vaigai and Tamirabarani and additionally cleared the jungles on its banks. He created a canal known as Melakkal.<sup>18</sup> Then he was created many villages around tanks known as Madakulam, Thirupparankundram, Nilaiyur, Avaniyapuram and Kuthiyarkunduetc. These canals were utilized for irrigation purpose. Underneath of his rule cultivation was boosted and the economy brought into prosperity.

### **Inscriptions on Land grants:**

The inscriptions of VisvanathaNayak, dated 1562 A.D, establish at Tinnevely and Ambasamudram disclose that KrishnappaNayak, the son of VisvanathaNayak has approved gifts of property to temple for worship and maintenances. Such facts disclose that KrishanappaNayak would be appointed as a prince and successor to the chair then he loved the royal honor of giving lands even before his succession to the royal chair. He prospered his father as a topped ruler solely in 1564 A.D.<sup>19</sup>The fixed exclusive privileges and honorable standing of the genetic chieftains of the palayam permitted them to donate, bestow their palayam's wealth and safety that triggered peace and

harmony within the whole kingdom that was divided by Visvanatha Nayak into seventy two palaymas. His progenies with the wisdom of nativity, sympathy and self-love to their kingdom, dominated with full vigor and responsibility so as to retain its glory throughout their rule.<sup>20</sup>

### **Inscriptions on Pooja:**

An inscription reveals that Visvanatha Nayak was commanding high respects. Another inscription dated 1543 A.D.<sup>21</sup> discloses that the officers of Visvanatha Nayak performed Mahapuja in temple for his prosperity. Such evidences label that the officers of the state accomplished special pooja or worship for the wellbeing of the ruler. The epigraphic accounts the Nayak rulers of Madurai expose that they were benevolent, orthodox and conservatives in maintaining the executive policies of their predecessors. The inscription dated 1643 A.D., discloses that a village referred to as Tirumalasadram was granted to the Temple of Chokkanathaswamy at Madurai, for guiding bound festivals, throughout Thai and Vaikasi. The Nayak Kings conserved the customs by yielding villages, structuring temples and creating arrangements for the poojas and festivals of the temples.<sup>22</sup>

### **Inscriptions on Devadana and Brahmadeya lands:**

All the Nayak rulers followed the same technique to grant land to Brahmins as devadana and brahmadeya. Furthermore, maximum of the Dalavays of the Nayak rulers were Brahmins. Although the Nayaks didn't disturb the standard structure of the society, they honored the Brahmins and approved distinct privileges to them. An inscription of Visvanatha Nayak, found at Viravanallur close to Ambasadram, dated 1551 A.D. revealed regarding the devadana and Brahmadeya lands. The inscription of MuthuVirappa Nayak establishes at Madurai, dated 1609 A.D. exposed that Nallur, surnamed MuthuviramahipalaSamudram provided to Brahmins.

### **Inscriptions on caste system:**

Nayaks followed rigidity of the class structure. Vijayaranga Chokkanatha's inscription dated 1719 A.D., point out that the merchants of a village known as vattilikkundu, close to Periyakulam belonged to eight castes, namely, Kaundans, Komuttis, Reddiyars, Muhammadans, Agamudaiyars, Pillais, Kambala Nayakkars and Shannars.<sup>23</sup> The Nayak rulers were thoughtful towards all castes and that they failed to separate their subjects either by caste, faith or language that was clear from the grant or sasanam of Mangammal. Queen Mangammal had allowed and granted a cadjansasanam in 1705 A.D., authorizing the Pattunulkarans or Sourastras of Madurai to monitor the rights suggested for the Brahmins with reference to YajurUpakarma ceremony, viz., the ceremony of the restoration of the sacred thread.<sup>24</sup> Therefore from side to side her determinations she carried social harmony and also the frictions between the castes were prohibited once forever. The Nayak rulers themselves were ancient and traditionalists then they strictly determined rigidity within the class structure.<sup>25</sup>

### **Inscriptions on decentralized system of administration:**

The administrative structure of the Nayaks of Madurai was commenced from village at base level and Maakana or seemai or nadu as its second level and the province or the palayam at its third level. This province was otherwise known as rajya or desam, mandalam or rashtra. There have been few giant provinces particularly Trichinopoly, Tinnelvely and Satyamangalam. The settlements were having the terms mangalam, samudra, kudi, kulam, patti, puram, city and kurichchi as its suffixes. This became habitual among them. They followed political hierarchy.<sup>26</sup> They were interested to introduce relevant modifications to suit the conditions of the days, so as to bring associate degree orderly administration. Welfare and well-being of the people was important concentration of the rulers. The miscellaneous inscription of the Nayak period reveals their administrative units.

In the light of the above facts, by adopting the analytical, interpretative historical research methodology, the facts are disclosed and covered in different chapters in the following way. Every one



of them will explicate the distinctive features, pertaining to a specific area of analysis and will present the history of the Nayaks of Madurai in a connected form.<sup>27</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Nayak rulers from Visvanatha Nayak to Rani Meenakshi contributed lot to society. Their service to society is known from the Inscriptions prevailing in the Temples. As repositories of inscriptions, they contain the details about the donations, gifts, endowments and all about the contribution of the Nayak rulers to temples and society. As they are in Tamil and Telugu scripts, they reveal the religious and secular activities. Inscriptions also speak about the economic transactions, system of taxes, punishments and justice etc. The Nayak kings were very kind and imposed rules and orders in order to maintain the old traditional set up of the society. Communal fellowship prohibition is disclosed by an inscription of 1623 A.D. There were numerous social groups called religious class, military class, the official class, connected to royalty, vocational classes based on professions such as cultivation, cattle rearing, fishing, shooting, washing, weaving, etc. There were collections of people involved in fine arts such as dancing, performing musical instruments, singing, etc. The strictness of the caste system was visible from the occurrence of caste supremacy, unapproachability and caste grading in the society. The Nayak kings promoted their weaving industry and provided employment opportunities to them. The epigraphy sources of the Nayak age mention not only about the grants of the kings but also about the names of the gifted villages such as Nallur etc.

The Nayak rulers accepted the basic ethical and moral codes. They tolerated the alien religions and rendered valuable services. The successive rulers of this Nayak line had continued the customs of their predecessors and followed the policy of religious tolerance. The Nayak Kings preserved the traditions by granting villages, building temples and making arrangements for the poojas and festivals of the temples. The agraharas were centres of learning and especially religious education was imparted. As the Nayak rulers were staunch Hindus, they followed an ancient Hindu educational policy combining religious and scientific studies and concentrating more on moral and ethical values. The Nayaks made liberal grants to mutts or religious centres or monasteries and temples, where free education was imparted.

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