



NAGARATHTHAR AND NARTHAMALAI- A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Pudukkottai district had an earliest Tamil Brahmi record located at Eladipattam in Siththannavasal attests the contact between Karnataka and Pudukkottai region. In this record the term "Erumi Nadu" denotes the Karnataka State of those days. Various trade contacts between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are well traced by the availability of Roman coins and other historical records.

KEY WORDS : *Siththannavasal attests , historical records , trading community.*

INTROCUCTION

The first evidence about the trading community in Pudukkottai area can be had from an inscription at Thirukkogarnam temple. An individual Varaguna Athiaraiyan alias Nakkan Chetti, a merchant has donated 15 Kalanju of gold for lighting a perpetual lamp at Gokarneswara temple during the 17th regnal year of Varaguna I (785 CE). According to the present state of our knowledge this is the first evidence regarding a Chetti merchant who was individually engaging in Trade activities. Munisandai Ainurruvar inscription might have been referred to a collective body of such individual merchants who later on associated themselves as a guild in the name of Ainurruvar.

"Ainurruvar" trade guild was started during 8th CCE at Ayhole in Karnataka State by five hundred Mahajanas. The first reference for the Ainurruvar in Tamil nadu can be had from Munisandai, in Pudukkottai district. During the 20th regnal year of Parantaka Chola I (927 CE) Some Ainurruvar people are mentioned in a record.¹ Here after there are so many records regarding Ainurruvar and other trade guild inscriptions found all over in Tamilnadu.

Likewise another guild "Manigramam" is also mentioned at Kodumbalur records in Pudukkottai region. Pumbuhar Manigramam and Kodumbalur Manigramam groups are found many of the early records of Tamilnadu. So by these Munisanthai and Kodumbalur evidences it is ascertained that trade activities are very hectic in the early Chola period and after.

In this context Narthamalai (Nagaraththarmalai) had served a busy commercial center during this period. This paper deals about the importance of Nagaraththarmalai and its trade connections in various periods and the historical monuments of this place.

Nagaram :- A well developed settlement of merchant is called as Nagaram or managaram. In Chola records Mamallapuram and Kanchipuram are called as Nagaram and managaram respectively. Nagaram, the term refers to not only a big locality but also its administrative body. This body "Nagaram" strives for the welfare of its members named 'Nagaraththar'. In Pudukkottai district the hill where they settled in a great number is named as Nagaraththarmalai but now it is corrupted as Narththamalai. This hill is located at the 19th



Kilometer from Pudukkottai on Trichy main road. It has 9 constituents namely Melamalai, Kottaimalai, Kadambarmalai, Paraiyarmalai, Uvachchan malai, Aluruttimalai, Pommadimalai, Manmalai and ponmalai.²

According to Perungalur Sthalapurana, since the sage Naratha stayed here once, it was named as Naratharmalai then it was corrupted as NARTHAMALAI. But one should left this theory as a mythological statement but the actual name bears the association of Nagaraththar community with this hilly region.

The first two stone records found engraved in this hill furnish the name of the hill.³ The first record reveals that one Kumuzhi (Sluice –water body) was built by an individual Mallan Viduman.⁴ No date and king's name is found in this record. But based on the Paleography this record can be dated to 9th CCE. The next record furnishes the 7th regnal year of Nirupathunga Pallava and reveals that one Vidul Viduku Mutharaiya a chieftain and sub-ordinate of the Pallava king had carved the Cave temple Sri koil.⁵

Malai Kadampur:- Rajaraja - I inscription dated his 22 regnal year (1007) refers to this place as Malaikadampur.⁶ But his 28th year record mentions the name of the village as 'Telunga Kulakala Puram'.⁷ Here the term Puram, is a suffix usually denotes a trade centre. 'Telunga Kulakala' was an epithet of Rajaraja – I, which means one who was the Yamah of Telunga Kula people (Andra region people may be western Chalukyas). Only this record mentions the merchants as Telunga Kulakala Purathu Nagaraththom. This inscription mentions that this Nagarathar had appointed drummers for beating drums during the pujas of Melaikadambar Mahadeva temple and donated lands for their temple services. From this one can assure that only during the early part of the eleventh Century (1013 CE) alone Nagarathar people were occupied this hill.

The name TelungaKulakala Puram was existed upto Rajendra I and Rajathiraja I periods. During this time it was a part of Annavayil Kurram in Konadu unit whichwas under Keralanthaka Valanadu, a larger division.

The later Pandya records mentions as 'Nagaram Telunga Kulakala purathu Nagarathom'⁸ In this record the donors and the signatories are having the tittle Chetti. So, it is clear hat only after the later Pandya period, because of the thick population of chettis, this hill was named as Nagaraththarmalai.

Charitable activities of Nagarathar in NARTHAMALAI:-

Number of stone records are found here which reveal various charitable activities undertaken by the nagarathar people from Rajaraja –I period to the end of later Pandya period. During Rajaraja - I period, some drummers were appointed for beating drum at Melaikadambar temple and they were given wetlands and a lake Arankaneri for their services by the Nagaraththar.⁹

During the 5th regnal year of Rajendra Chola I, lands were donated as archanaboga to the residents of different communities and some chettis at the villages Kilthayanallur and Kunrathur.¹⁰ The names of the Chettis who got the lands are as follow:-

1. Local merchant Buttan Thiruvan Amthan.
2. Veyya Kutti piranthakan.
3. Muththan Devan.
4. Chetti Kunran.
5. Rajendra Chola Brahma Chetti.
6. Gangai Gonda Chola Anukka Selai Chetti.
7. Rajathiraja Selai Chetti.
8. Kadaram Konda Chola Selai Chetti.
9. Rajaraja Damma Chetti.
10. Rajendra Chola Dhamma Chetti.

These Chettis and other people had got house sites.

During the Rajendra Chola II period, one merchant from Chola kerala puram in Mizhalai nadu Which was a part of Rajendra singa Valanadu has donated 5 pots of holy water (Thirumanjanam) for the sacred bath of the God. Melaikadambar on three Santhipoojas daily.¹¹ During the same period the Nagaraththar

had donated rice for the food offering to the Goddess of Thirumalai Kadambar temple. Daily 4 measures (Nali) of rice was given to the whole year (360 days).¹²

Kulothunga Chola III Inscription belong to the 27th regnal year (1205 CE) Nagarathar had sold the devadana lands of Kailasanathar temple for the value of 130 ½ old salakaicoin to one merchant of Parambur Kadambar Sengudiyan Gangatharan of the same Nagaratharmalai merchant.¹³ In this inscription an important point can be seen that certain lands already donated as Pallichandam (ic) donated land for Jain temple was relieved from that temple. According to this record, it is confirmed that once there was a Jain temple also at Narththamalai. It was called as Samanar Kudagu.

During 1215 CE, the Nagarathar of this hill had sold certain devadana lands of this temples for 68000 Kasu to two merchants viz, Kadambar Periyar alias Dhanabalan of Kadambur and Udhaiyan Periyar alias Periyadevan of Paluvur.¹⁴

The above mentioned two merchants who got lands from the Nagaraththar malai had accepted to pay 30 Kalam (Measure) of paddy each for every year for the food offerings of two temples viz, Nataraja of Thirumalai kadambar temple and Thiru Anaikavudaiyar temple respectively. The total 60 kalam paddy will be measured by a leaner measure Thirusulakkal by name (Trident marked measure). During the failure of the crop the supply of paddy will be reduced according to the yield of the land of that particular season. This document was written by an accountant Maruthur Udaiyan Periyar Manakka Jothi as per the instruction of the Nagaraththar. By this arrangement one can assume this nagaram was administrated by a systematic setup.

During Maravarman Sundara Pandyan period (1225 CE), the Nagaraththar had donated as tax free one ma extent of land to Thirumalaikadambar temple. From this land 10 Kalam of paddy was levied to the temple during the full crop season and pathakku measure of paddy was levied during the failure of crop.¹⁵

Thirukamakottamudaiya Nachchiar (Uma) idol was installed at Thirumalai kadambar temple by one Periya Devan Uthaiyan during the 12th regnal year (1218 CE) of Maravarman Sundara pandya -I. For this image he had built a separate stone shrine also.¹⁶ More over six ma kani extent of land was given for the expenses of sacred dress for which 60 kalam paddy per year was levied from this land. All the taxes of this land were given to Nagaram. Dr.Thirumalai Nambi has opined that all the lands at Nagaratharmalai were under the control of Nagaraththar and all the land transactions were under the purview of Nagaram.¹⁷

At Narththamalai, one separate Vishnu temple was constructed by the Nagaraththar and named it as Pathinen bhumi Vinnakara Emperuman. Two of his consorts are also housed with Vishnu God. More over 5 Ma ¾ and 3 Kani measure of land was also donated to this Vishnu temple as Thiruvudaiyattam for the expenses of sacred food offering to the god and goddesses. For these 57 Kalam of paddy was supplied per year.¹⁸ The donation given by the Nagarathar to Vijayalaya Cholisvaram temple is also registered here but due to damage of the record full details are not traceable.¹⁹

One more Siva temple in the name of Nagarivaram has been constructed in this hill by the Nagarathar. It also might have been constructed during Maravarman Sundara Pandyas period. Three ma extent of land located in three different places were given to one Senkuli Aludaiyan alias Iruniti Kuberan of Veliarrur for which he had to pay 24 kalam paddy every year for Nagarivaram temple. This paddy might be reduced during the failure of crop.²⁰

The signatories of this document are all chettis who were engaged in a particular trade. They are, Irasa Gambira Uththama Chola Silai Chetti, Alagiya Chola Silai Setti, Jayankonda Chola Silai Chetti, Anukka Silai Chetti, Kulothunga Chola Silai Chetti, etc. Thirukkamakottamudaiya Nachchiar temple was built during the 12th year of Maravarma Sundara Pandyan. After three years (15th year) one ma and half measure of land was given to Periyar Uthaiyan alias Periya devan and again he gave it as Thirunamaththukkani for the same temple.

Narththamalai and Merchant guilds:-

Disai Ayiraththu Aynurruvar and Peru Niraviyar were the two merchant guilds are mentioned in one of the inscriptions at Narththamalai. An interesting information is mentioned in an inscription found at

Narththamalai dated to 1055 -56 Rajendra II period.²¹ Since the inscription is partly damaged the full details of the record is not known. According to this record a girl from a chetti family had committed suicide by consuming poison because the obstacles made by some people in her marriage ritual (may be tying mangala sutra and Santhi muhurtham). Two individuals Thillai Kuththan and another one were against the wishes of that Chetti girl. They had arranged another girl daughter of one Raman for that marriage purpose. On knowing that the previous girl had consumed poison and died. Disai Ayiraththu Aynurruvar and Peru Niraviyar who came to know the incident as an act of expiation of this sin had established a temple for the deity Sanku Parameswari. In addition to that the guild people made arrangement for lighting on three santhis at the Mahadevar temple of this village.

This incident explains some kind of marriage ritual prevailed on those days in chetti families. These types of inscriptions are already noticed at Karur and Bahur (Pondicheri) which may be studied comparatively to know the details of marriage rituals on those days.

CONCLUSION:-

From the fore going materials one can conclude that number of small hills are collectively named as Nagaraththar malai because of the hectic business activities of Nagaram community. Nagaraththar had built one Vishnu temple Patinen Bhumi Vinnagaram and a Siva temple Nagarisvaram. This Narththamalai has changed as Telunga Kulakala Puram by the epithet of Rajaraja- I during the days of Rajaraja. But it was again changed as Kulothunga Chola Pattinam during the period of Kulothunga Chola I. Disai Ayiraththu Aynurruvar and Peru Niraviyar lived here had played a great role in the life of Narththamalai. Thus the study of Narththamalai reveals various interesting social and economical activities at this area of history.

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