

THIRUVARANKULAM - A CULTURAL STUDY GLEANED FROM INSCRIPTIONS

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Inscriptions are the basic reliable sources for writing history of any place or country. These records cannot be tempered according to the Wish of any body. Particularly in Pudukkottai district number of villages has historic temples and considerable number of inscriptions are engraved on the walls of the temple. One among the villages, Thiruvarkulam is well known to the historians for its architecture and variety of inscriptions. This paper deals to trace the cultural history of that village based on the inscriptions found on the walls of Haratheerthesvara temple.

A Brief Note on the Temple

The temple of Haratheerthesvara and Sri Brahadamba is held in high veneration by devotees far and near. The garbhagraham of Haratheerthesvara may be assigned to the beginning of the late Chola epoch¹. It consists of central shrine, ardhamantapa and Maha mantapa on the same period (id) later Chola period. The Sthalapurana says that this temple was built by Karikala Chola. This king cannot be connected with Karikala of Sangam Period. But Karikala is one of the titles assumed by Rajaraja II (1146-1163 C.E) and Kulothunga III (1178-1218 CE). So one can assume that this temple might have built by either Rajaraja II or Kulothunga III.

Details of the Inscriptions

In this temple 35 number of inscriptions are recorded. Among them later Cholas, later Pandya, Vijayanakara rulers, chieftain families of Pallavaraya ,kangaiyaraya records are included. The list of them follows².

1. Kulothunga Chola III 2 Nos.
2. Maravarma Sundarapandy I 1 No.
3. Sadaiyan Sundaram 1 No.
4. Veera Pandya 5 Nos.
5. Maravarma Sundara Pandya II 1 No.
6. Rajarajan Sundara Pandya 2 Nos.
7. Maravarma Kulasekaran 4 Nos.
8. Maravarma Veera Pandya 6.Nos.
9. Srivallabha 1 No.
10. Mallikarchunarayar 2 Nos.
11. Krishna Devarayar 2 Nos.
12. Achutha Devarayar 3 Nos.

13. Vijayanakara – No king 2 Nos.
14. Chieftains & individuals records 16 Nos.
15. By these 48 records so far documented the full history of the village and temple and its surroundings can be elaborately studied.

The Early Inscriptions of this Temple

The earliest inscription of this temple belongs to the 39th regnal year of the Kulothunga chola III. It records that the Brahadhambal shrine was built by a lady Kannudaiya Perumal alias Pirati alwar, who was Nishatharaja of Thirukkodunkundram. She was the daughter of Nishatharaja Keralandar of Ponnamaravathi. From this record one can know that there were two different clans in Nishatharayar, a chieftain family. One family ruled Ponnamaravathi area and another family ruled Thirukkodungundram (Piranmalai area). They had matrimonial relations among them.³ This record is an important one because it is considered as the foundation inscription of the Brahadambal temple. So before its construction only the Siva temple alone might have existed. Then separate Amman shrine had erected. By this record we learnt Ponnamarapathi village was included in Puramalai Nadu alias Rajendra Chola Valanadu subdivision which in turn was annexed with Rajaraja Pandi Nadu a larger geographical division named during Rajaraja I.

Kulothunga chola's next inscription of this temple was engraved on his 40th regnal year (1219 CE)⁴ In this record the name of the God is mentioned as Thiruvarankulam Udaiya Nayanar. It is a collective decision taken by the Nattar body of Kurappalthalvu Devi Mangalam to settle the Prolonged issues between two groups of people. One group of people belong to the temple village, the other group of people lived other devadhana villages. In their dispute the cattle's and caused for a great loss by the decision of Nattars, their disputes were amicably settled and those who disobey this settlement to a great extent of land will be taken by the nattar to the temple. More over in this village the other community people like Sivabrahmanas, Chettis, Vellalas, Kaikkolas, Devaradiyars, Kammalars (Smiths) shepherds were also lived. Their land taxes paid to the temple also fixed by the nattars.

Pandya Inscriptions

Chola rule came to an end around 1279 Ce with the rule of Rajendra Chola III. Manipulating the situation into his favour Maravarman Sundara Pandya I (1216- 1238 CE) emerged as the king of Pandya country. He revenged Cholas and captured the chola country and by his brave attitude Chola country was ruled by the Pandyas for a long period. During his 15th regnal year one record is engraved on the Brahadamba temple walls. It is a damaged record only furnish the name of the Goddess Thirukkomakotta Mudaiya Thampiratti, The record mentions a word Malaimandalam which means Kerala area,. So some donation might have been given by a donor hailed from Malaimandalam.⁵

The second record of Pandyas found here belong to the 12th regnal year of Saidaiya Varman Sundara Pandya. His coronation might have been commenced around 1250. So this

record may belong 1262 CE but it is largely damaged to know the purpose of this document. Nambis of this temple and Jeyasinga Kula Kala valanadualso mentioned in this record⁶.

Establishment of New Santhi Pujas

Usually in Siva temple six times Pujas will be conducted Pujas are other wise known as Santhi. During the 7th regnal year of Vira Pandya Deva. One Santhi Puja was established by Mudimannama Nallur alias Perunkarraikudi in the name Mudimannaman Santhi. This village is known as a settlement of warriors called Padai Parru. For the expenses of this Santhi Puja certain lands were endowed to Thiruvarankulam temple.⁷

Again during the 15th regnal year of Veera Pandya, the nattavar body of Vallanadu in Rajaraja Valanadu had decided to settle some cash due to be given to the Sivabrahmans of the temple by themselves. It was the arrangement previously made by Sundarapandya period and now it is end and continued by Nattars.⁸ Another one record of Veerapandya engraved on his 17th regnal year is completely damaged and not able to trace the purpose of the record.

Donation Arrangement by Sema Pillai Bhuvana Singadevar

This record furnishes very interesting informations which belongs to the 4th year of VeeraPandya.⁹ First arrangement is made to offer Puttu amuthu to goddess Thampirattiyar by purchasing a law to the cost of 1500 Kasu. The tax due from this land is allotted for the expenses of Puttu amuthu. For this offering to be done on every Sunday, the some donor has given 3 Kuruni measure of Paddy. One nail of dol, one coconut, one Uri measure of Ghea, bettle leaves 20 etc.

Moreover the same record refers to the donations made to light perpetual lamps in this temple for various occasions. Particularly the black smiths had been bevied three Kasu per furnace and by this 6 Kasu were collected from 2 furnaces by which Ulakku measure of ghee was got to light to perpetual lamp.

Vallanattu Araiyan (Chieftains) had collected taxes from the blacksmiths five achchu per year. Each achchu is equivalent to 1200 Kasu. So by five achchu they got 6000 Kasu and 300 Kasu was extracted from Panguni festival tax. So totally 6300 Kasu got interest 17 ½ daily. By this interest 17 ½ Kasu 75 lamps were lighted. Again certain sheep were donated of lighting 23 lamp and torch. So this record gives elaborate information regarding the lighting arrangement in this temple.

One more individual Valithunai Perumal alias Viladarayar had donated certain lamps for the welfare of Samanthan (Army chief). These lamp torches were lighted in the temple gates and supplied oil for regular lighting, Nagaraththar and other inhabitants of the village.¹⁰ The prakara wall of this temple had been constructed in the name of Kangeyarayar during the 9th regnal year of Maravarman Sundara Pandya. Kangeya rayar was the chieftain who ruled as a subordinate ruler in this region during Sundara Pandya period.¹¹

One king Rajarajan Sundara Pandya had ruled in this area for some years. This king is none but one who was the legitimate son of Maravarman Kulasekaran (1268-1311 CE) He

was denied the throne and so he seek support from the Kilji army as a requisite of it Malikafur invasion occurred during 1311 CE. This incident is Properly mentioned in Kolappal record as "Sundara Pandyan Thurukkarodu Vanthapothu" In thiruvarankulam temple during Sundara's 14th regnal year Nagaraththar of Arulmoli Deva Puram had donated certain land as tax free for lighting perpetual lamp in this temple. Four boundaries of the donated lands are demarcated and mentioned in detail.¹² In this record one name of coin "ValithiranthaPanam" is mentioned. This term may be discussed separately. The next record is the continuation of the previous one which mentions the supply of ghee for lighting lamp already donated by the Nagarathat of Arulmoli deva Puram.

During the Kulasekara Pandya period one officer Bhuvaneka Vira Thondaiman by name had donated one gold diadem to the temple is record in the inscription.¹⁴ Bhuvaneka Viran is the epithet of Pandya kings. Thondaiman was a clan name who migrated from Pallava region and served as sub-ordinates under Pandya rules.

Thiruvarankulam has also annexed with one new hamlet PerunkaraiKKudi and hence the name is mentioned in this record Perunkaraikudi alias Thiruvarankulam. The Urars of this village Purchased by cash and got mortgaged certain lands from Marava community people of Perunkudi. They agreed to pay taxes for this lands to the temple of Thiruvarankulam.¹⁵

One Kalikadinthia Pandya deva was incharge of the administration of Thiruvarankulam region during Maravarman Kulasekaras eleventh regnal year (i.e.) 1279 CE on this time for the merit of this chieftain the sthanikas (Administrators) of Thiruvarankulam temple appointed certain flower garden servants and assigned their wages in cash and food.¹⁶

One medical officer was appointed (Vaidhya Acharya) at Thiruvarankulam temple during the 24th regnal year of Kulasekara Pandya.¹⁷ His name is mentioned Muthaliyar Nimbavana Vaithyachariyar. For his lively hood certain lands were assigned as Vaidhyavrithi. The temple administrators Srikariyam, Srimayesvara, temple accountant were signed in this order.

Certain group of people had equrilled themselves and caused to severe injuries by attacking weapons. They are known as Poovarasakuli Araiya makkal and Marumakkal (sons and cousins) and other groups. This dispute caused a prolonged vengeance and lead to social unrest. So certain communal leaders entered into an agreement to settle this issue and order was restored and the resolution is recorded on the walls of the temple at Thiruvarankulam.¹⁸ Certain lands were donated as Thirunamaththukkani for the temple during Veerapandyas 9th regnal year.¹⁹

Vallanattu Nattar collectively decided to conate 11,000 Kasus and by that they donated a silver Kavasam (Covering of body) to the god of this temple. They also made some arrangements for the festival of Thiruvathirai asterism in the month of Markali (December -January)²⁰

The residential area of warriors is called as padaiparru or Parikragam. The warriors self led near this temple had a very long enmity between two groups and caused to social unrest. At the behest of the temple administrators the divided groups of these warriors came to an accord and registered it on the walls of the temple. According to this record they decided to end the prolonged enmity from their fathers days and here after they agreed to restore calm and peace in their residential area (ie) PadaiParru.²¹ One more inscription also deals with the some type of accord between two different groups.²²

Donation of Brahmins

Usually Brahmin community people depending upon the temple for their lived hood by employing as priests. They will get different kinds of donations by cash or land. Very rarely they also liberally donate to the temple where they are working. In the reign of Srivallabha Pandya one Brahmin individual Ulaga Pillai had donated something for the sacred bath of Vinayaka idol at this temple.²³

Interest of Vijayanakara Kings on this Temple

After finishing the anarchic rule of Madurai Sultanate by Kumara Kampanna Udaiyar, the Vijayanakara ruler during 1378 the whole of Pandya country came under Vijayanakara rule. These Vijayanakara rulers established a new rule based on religious settlements and so they liberally granted many developmental works in the temples. In this manner Thiruvarankulam temple also benefited by the rulers of Vijayanakara.

During 1514 CE, Mallikarjuna rayar this area was ruled by some chieftain groups namely Thondaiman. He created one Santhi Puja in the name of Alaiyil Anjatham Santhi. For the expenses of this Santhi Puja certain lands were given in Palaiyur nadu.²⁴ Swami nayakkar was the administrator of this area during the rule of Mallikarjuna rayar's son. In this time three villagers namely Palaikudi, Kalankudi and kilinallur had arranged to protect their villages by appointing Padikaval warriors. These warriors got some lands for their lively hood by purchase and mortgage. But they were not able to pay the tax due for these lands hence finally they sold their lands to the temple and settled their tax dues to the rulers.²⁵ The same issue is also registered in the another inscription of Krishnadevaraya period.²⁶ The same village lands were resold for temple car festival and regular performance of Pujas.²⁷ During Achutharayar period certain lands were donated to the temple.²⁸ In Thiruvarankulam separate quarters for warriors and merchants were allotted. Warriors are named as Padaiveedu, but merchants area was called as Peruntheru. These two group of people collectively donated some lands as Madapuram (temple mutt) for the maintenance of temple mutt.²⁹

In the year 1539 CE, Pudukkottai area was ruled by Pallavarayar family. One Sivanthelunthan Thirumalai Pallavarayar installed one Santhi Puja in his name and endowed some lands for the maintenance of this SanthiPuja.³⁰ Nagaraththar played crucial role in religious activities all over Tamilnadu. Particularly in Pudukkottai region. Since it is their homeland they showed much interest in the religious matters. In this temple the

Nagaraththar of 9 village groups had installed a swing for the Thiruvathirai swing festival during the year 1542 CE. In this temple so many individual Philonthoraphist had donated liberally for the up keep of the temple.

One Chera Pandiyan alias Sankaran Devan of Kulathur had constructed a mantapa for this god Alagiya Kuththan³¹ Ulakan Thiyyakappillai of Muvallur Sundara Pandya Puram had donated a kalasam for special abulation.³²

Srirama Patta Pillai of Palaiyur alias Kulasekara Pattinam has donated one Silver Kavasam (body cover) to the God.³³ Another individual had dug out a well in the temple. One man had volunteered himself as a full time servant to the temple. One flower garden is raised by a noble man Arasa Kanta raman. Southern side compound wall was built by Nagarathar belonging 9 groups. One water tank was dug by one Pallikondan Alagiya Perumal. The temple gopura was constructed in the name of Kangeyarayar by Araiyen Periyan Vallavan.

The front mantapa was built by the donation of various individuals. Some of the merchants donated each one pillar for constructing the mantapa. Their names are engraved on the pillars.

Conclusion

The collective study of these inscriptions reveals various facts about the society living around the Thiruvarankulam temple. This temple has served as a main resource for their lively hood. Some of the accords and peace settlements were arrived at the mantapa of the temple. Three different Santhi poojas were initiated by the rulers of this area in their names. Construction of Brahadambal shrine, construction of main gopura and prakara wall are all well attested by the inscription. Various sections of the society, Brahmanas, traders, warriors, Vellalas, Carpenters and Shepherds were lived peacefully around the temple and liberally contributed for the welfare of the temple and Ur. 700 years history of this temple have been trace by the study of these inscription.

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