

## THE REFERENCES OF NADU UNVEILED THROUGH HERO STONES

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### **Abstract**

*A deeper understanding of the socio-political, military, and cultural milieu of mediaeval South India can be gained through the examination of Hero stones, which are used to study Nadu, which is a geographical unit in South India. Hero stones, also known as Veeragallu, are memorial stones that are dedicated to honouring warriors who have passed while in the course of safeguarding their communities or while engaged in combat. The inscriptions and carvings that are presented here provide important historical data regarding the Nadu hierarchy. During the mediaeval period in Tamilakam, Nadu was a division of administration that frequently included a number of villages. Local chieftains or delegates were responsible for the administration of the Nadu, which played an important part in the collecting of taxes, the administration of justice, and the organisation of the military.*

**Keywords:** Hero stones, Veeragallu, Nadu, territorial unit, Tamilakam.

### **Introduction**

Prior to the time of the sangam, there was a geographically-based territorial unit known as the Nadu. It was during the Sangam period when the terminologies that denoted "Nadu" were utilised in a variety of various ways. In his book titled "Geography," Ptolemy makes reference to the fact that the region known as "Nadu" existed,<sup>i</sup> as 'Ay Noyi', 'Pandi Noyi', etc., and this is to specify the territorial boundaries of the different clans. Strabo also has mentioned in his work has given a citation about 'Nadu', as 'Firnai',<sup>ii</sup> which would have been made to mention the Chera territory (Poozhi Nadu). Hence it is understood that the 'Nadu' division was existing long back even before the Sangam era and we get many references from the Greek literatures and thus they had the knowledge about the geographical configuration of Tamil Nadu. Thus, we are also aware about the five Tinai's in application during the Sangam period and this is evinced through many literary works.<sup>iii</sup> The term 'Nadu' is also used by many Dravidian languages,<sup>iv</sup> initially by the South Dravidian languages. R.Nagaswamy, the renowned archaeologist, says, The term 'Nadu' would have been derived from the word 'Nadu' (eL).<sup>v</sup> According to Senivaratne,<sup>vi</sup> the term 'Janapadas', provides us the perception that the word 'Jana' means people and the word 'pada' means foot. Hence, it may be comprehended as the place where the people or the clan stepped in and thus arose the territorial segregation named after the settlement of each clan. He again states that, the word 'Nadu' would have derived from the word 'Nada' which mentions about the migratory mode of life,<sup>vii</sup> which eventually apprehends about the pastoral mode of living and thus, the period when the Hero stone culture originated in the Tamil country.

### The Earlier Existence of 'Nadu' - Insight's from Sangam Poems

The evidences of the mention about the word 'Nadu' before the state formation or before the formation of the Sangam rulers and this is evinced through the names being bestowed upon the head of the clan as, 'Nadan', 'Ooran', 'Serppan', for instance we could see this in an Sangam poem as follows,

'Nadan engo Ooran engo  
 Paadimizh panikkadal serppan engo  
 Yaanganam Mozhigo Onguvaat Kothaiyay  
 Punavar thattai Pudaippin ayalathu  
 Irangu kathir alamaru kazhaniyum  
 Pitangu neer serpin pullorungu ezhume'.<sup>viii</sup>

In this song, the author sings about the head of the clan who ruled that particular 'Nadu'. This shows that, the leader's who originated during the evolution of the 'Nadu' were recognized as, 'Nadan', 'Ooran', 'Serppan' etc. Initially the heads of the clan who dwelt in the Mullai and Kurinji regions bore the term 'Nadu' along with their name.<sup>ix</sup>

'Puliyodu Porundha Pungoor Yaanai  
 Narkodu Nayandha anbil Kaanavar  
 Virsuzhi patta Naama poosal  
 Urumidai Kadiyidi Karaiyum  
 Perumalai Naadan .....

In the above song, we are able to see that the word 'Nadan', was the ruling head of the 'Nanmalai Nadu', and he is explained in such a way to be associated with the forest and the mountains and thus shows that the 'Nadan' is associated with the Mountaneous region (Kurinji) and the forest covered areas (Mullai).<sup>x</sup>

### Evolution of Hero Stones

Hero stones are memorial stones that are placed in commemoration of heroes who died on the battlefield while defending kings, defence of herds, or defence of ladies who were in need of assistance. The ancient megalithic worship is the ancestor of the hero stone cult; yet, the evolution of the hero stone cult has not been a consistent progression.<sup>xi</sup> In other parts of Tamil Nadu, the construction of hero stones is restricted to a few specific situations. The memory of the megalithic cult continued to be passed down in the shape of memorial stones, but only in the relatively isolated regions where cattle raising continued to be their primary means of sustenance. Two nearby clans that were involved in the lifting and recovering of livestock were responsible for the majority of the early memorials that were created. These memorials were created for the cattle. It has been discovered that the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra all have hero stones of this type. Numerous Hero stones that serve as memorials to war may be seen all over Tamil Nadu. Inscriptions carved into the stones of heroes are significant resource for the history of Tamil Nadu. These inscriptions portray scenarios of battles in which troops are mounted on horses and elephants.

## References to Hero Stones under Various Appellations

There are also some of them that have a wall of a fort engraved into them. Among the names that are commonly used to refer to hero stones in the local community are "Vediappan kovil," "Vedan kovil," "Krishnarappan kovil," "Muniappan kovil," "Iyanar appan kovil," and "Silaikal, Veeran kovil."<sup>xii</sup> etc. Despite the fact that there are only a few names that are commonly used for the hero stones in Tamil Nadu, such as Vediappan kovil, Muniappan kovil, and Veeran kovil, all of these names are used. There are additional stone houses located in the vicinity of the main stone house, and the primary hero stone is orientated such that it faces the northern direction. These kinds of stone homes can be seen in a variety of locations. Even in modern times, the populace continues to venerate these hero stones as if they were a deity of the hamlet.<sup>xiii</sup>

According to Monica Janowski,<sup>xiv</sup> In this location, stone and water are both extremely significant substances from a cosmological and ontological standpoint, just as they are in other parts of the world throughout the entire region. This is almost certainly due to the fact that they are located at opposite extremes of a continuum that ranges from soft and wet to hard and dry. She says that this continuum has a crucial position in the beliefs that are held regarding the movement of vital force throughout the universe. As a result of the fact that vital force flows more quickly and strongly through moist and soft things, water is the substance through which vital force flows the most efficiently. This is the logic behind the significance of water. Hard, dry things, and stone in particular, which is located at the other end of the continuum, are locations where vital force slows down and eventually (nearly) ceases moving altogether. Consequently, stone is a storehouse of living force and an accumulation of substances.

## Reflection of the Term 'Nadu' in Hero Stones

During the reign of the Pallava monarchs, the political climate in Tamil Nadu was completely distinct from that of other regions. Despite the fact that the memorial stones make reference to the Pallava king, they didn't have any direct involvement in this region. They had no interest in interfering with the social life of the society; rather, they were solely concerned with preserving the territorial integrity. As a result, the Hero stones are a reflection of the local events, and they mostly deal with the number of livestock raids that took place amongst the local leaders within a single territorial division known as "Nadu."<sup>xv</sup> and there is a strong connection between the memorial stones and the folks that live in the area. It is clear that the local people were in charge of administering the "Nadu," as evidenced by the Hero stone inscriptions that can be discovered in many different regions of Tamil Nadu.<sup>xvi</sup> The Hero stones were implanted for the warriors who mostly engaged in livestock raids, which are confined to the Mullai tract. These individuals were primarily nomadic during their evolutionary stage, but they eventually settled down and began living in a settled existence. This is another crucial detail that should be noted. This style of state construction is strongly mirrored in the Hero stones by the fact that the word "Nadu" is mentioned, and the Heroes or the head of the clan are either suffixed or prefixed by the

specific "Nadu" to which they belong. Both of these elements are examples of how the Hero stones reflect this kind of state formation.<sup>xvii</sup>

The 'Nadu', played a vital role in sourcing raw materials for the active trade and commerce in Tamil Nadu and this is also discerned through a Sangam poem eulogizing the head of that particular 'Nadu' as,<sup>xviii</sup>

Perumalai silambil vettam pogiya  
 Serimadai ambin valvil kaanavan  
 Porudhu tholai yaanai vennkodu kondu  
 Neerthigazh silambin nanponn agazhvon  
 Kanporudhu imaikkum thinmani kilarppap  
 Vainnudhi vaanmarappu odiya ukka  
 Thenneer aalikadukkum muthamodu  
 Mooveru thaaramum orungudan ootri.

Thus, we could find the rich source materials being mentioned about the 'Nadu' which later indulged in trading activities especially external trade and enlarged its scope and evolved into larger components of territorial divisions. One geographical division was composed of many 'Nadu' with one head for each 'Nadu' was the system of governance that prevailed during the early historic period. The head of the 'Nadu' were either mentioned as 'Nadan' or 'Velir'. There are many Sangam poems sung about the sourceful areas which again been held in possession by the 'Velirs'. Nevertheless, there no mention about the number of Nadus held by a 'Velir' or the number of 'Kudis' under a 'Velir'.

## Conclusion

As a consequence of this, the Nadus played an important role during the early historical period, and their influence continued to be felt in Tamil Nadu until the Vijayanagar period. This suggests that the empirical impact is rather low in these locations, with the local leaders of the Nadus being the only ones who have a significant role in the governance of the local community. In this article, various references are cited about the early employment of the name "Nadu" in Sangam literature. This is also proved by the fact that the earliest Hero stones were created prior to the Sangam literary period.

## References

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- <sup>viii</sup> Puram 49.

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