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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**VANATHIRAYARS IN TAMIL NADU INSCRIPTIONS**

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**Abstract**

Vanathirayars were sub-ordinates to the nayaks of Madurai. As per available inscription and other historical records, they were the patrons of Vaishnavism. Mostly inscriptions which say about Vanathirayars are found on the walls of the temples especially the vaishna temples. The structures and the style of constructions that followed in the vaishnava temples in pandya kingdom indicate that these temples would have been built originally during the period of later pandyas and then rebuilt with later additions during the periods of Vanathirayars.

**Keywords:** Inscriptions, Tamil nadu

**Introduction**

Vanathirayars were sub-ordinates to the nayaks of Madurai. As per available inscription and other historical records, they were the patrons of Vaishnavism. Mostly inscriptions which say about Vanathirayars are found on the walls of the temples especially the vaishna temples. The structures and the style of constructions that followed in the vaishnava temples in pandya kingdom indicate that these temples would have been built originally during the period of later pandyas and then rebuilt with later additions during the periods of Vanathirayars.

Vanathirayars had made many gifts of lands

and other donations to many Vaishnava temples, for their development and maintenance.

In their official flags too, the emblem of eagle was engraved and this flag was called "Garuda kodi" Eagle was their symbol. They had renovated the temples destroyed by the mohamadan invaders.

The researcher (myself) has visited veeraalagar temple at Mana Madurai which was rebuilt during the period of Vanathirayars.

In an inscription found on the south base of the mandaba in front of central shrine the name of Sundaratholudiyar Mavali vanathirayar's is seen. The

period is 1515 to 1533 C.E. It is attested by V. Vedachalam the author of "Pandyanatil Vanathirayarkal".

Thus Vanathirayars had played an important role in the administration and also socio-economic life of the people of Pandya territory.

Since Sangam period, local chieftains supported the imperial rulers, Pallavas, Pandiyas and Cholas. Vanathirayars were local chieftains during different historical periods.

A good number of authors have contributed to the history of Vanathirayars among them Waller Eliot, Subramania Ayyar, Sathianatha Ayyar, Neelakandasastri and Sadasiva Pandarathar are unique in their dealings with the history of the chieftain. It is a simple history since 11th century C.E.

Pandya country Vanathirayars, later Chola and Pandya period Vanathirayars, the officers during later Pandyas, Islam period Vanathirayars, Madurai Nayak period Vanathirayars were important. They helped the ruling dispensations by their military contributions. Their total history has been divided into Pandya period, Mohamadan period, Vijayanagar period and Madurai Nayak period. Their history has been derived from available inscriptions, copperplates, coins and palm leaf manuscripts. But inscriptions are the main stay to form the history of Vanathirayars.

### **Important Inscriptions:**

Generally these chieftains, called themselves as "Mavali vanathirayars" in most of the inscriptions, they are described as the successors of "Mavali Sakravarthi". Some inscriptions depict them as "Vanars" or "Panars". Their history is available in fragments from different sources.

In the words of Dr. Vedachalam this people had existed as tributaries during the period of Kadampas in 4th century C.E. They called themselves as "Vanathi Rayar" after the disintegration of Chola, Pandya powers, they captured the official post of the kingdoms. Especially under the later Pandyas, they

acted as local chieftain in Pudukottai, Madurai, Virudhunagar and Ramanathapuram areas. During the period of poligar system under the Madurai Nayaks, they had acted as Palayakkarars.

### **1. Alagarkoil inscriptions:**

In one of the inscriptions at Alagarkoil Madurai, a name "Panathirajan" is found in fragments. But it is assumed that the Vanathirayars came to Pandya country during 11th century C.E. They might have come with the Chola army to Madurai.

2. **In Vadipatti** area, at a place called Athittam Siva Temple, an inscription was discovered. It says about a "Vanathi rajan". He had donated lands to the "Thenkarai Siva Temple" and also signed in the palm leaf authorised the dealings, on behalf of the Pandya ruler. The period is assigned to 12th century C.E.

### **3. Poetry in inscription**

A number of inscriptions in poetry form are available among them "Kudimiyam malai" Siva temple inscription says about a lot of information about the Vanathirayars.

4. **An inscription** belonged to the period of Maravarman Sundara Pandyan (1216-1238 C.E) was found at "Aruvi Malai". It says about "Thirunatta perumal Sundara Pandya Vanathirayar". Thirunatta perumal a Vanathirayar added his emperor's name with his name and came to be called as "Thirunatta perumal Sundarapandya Vanathirayar".

5. **"Thenkarai inscription"** of Sadayavarman Kulasekara Pandyan says about a Vanathirayar. His name is "Arulalan Sevagatheran vanathirajan". The period of the inscription is ascribed to 1243 C.E. He had donated a number of things to Madurai Meenakshi Temple and also renovated it by the order of the Pandya ruler.

### **6. Ponnamaravathi inscription**

It was inscribed during the period of Sundara Pandya third year of his rule. It says about a vanathirayar. His name is "Thiru Venkadathudayan vanathirayar".

### **7. Thirumayyam inscription**

A chieftain under the pandya ruler sadayavarman sundara pandian called " Arasuputhan samanthan vanathirayar " administered Thirumayyam area .He had denoted a land for the pooja's being conducted at a Siva temple at Thirumayyam.His inscription says about his administration.

### **8.Thirukkalakudi inscription**

In the inscription at Thirukkalakudi, Vanathirayar's name is found. He is called Magatha Nayanar parakkirama pandya Mavali vanathirayar. The date of the inscription is 8th year of rule of Sadayavarman, Sundara pandyan (C.E.1259). The vanathirayar had another surname called "Bavanakkaran". It is said that a canal called "Bavanakkaran vaikkal" was named after him.

### **9.Kudumiyan Malai inscription**

Sadayavarman veerapandyan(1253-1281 C.E) period. It says about the village called "visalur" and the agricultural lands around the village. The lands were later granted to the god residing in kudumiyan malai by Mavali vanathirayar.

### **10.Chinnamanur inscription**

The period of the inscription is assigned to 1274 C.E. It was made during the reigning period of Veerapandian. This inscription says about Mavali vanathirayar.

### **11.Perumalpatti(Srivilliputhur) inscription**

It is found in the bank of a tank near perumalpatti. It says about the irrigational arrangement of the area during the 2nd year of the rule of Veera pandya. This inscription was made by Gangadhara Vanathirayar.

### **12. Solaimalai perumal and Kappalur inscription**

Thiruvadana and Aranthangi areas were once called as "Muthurkukootram". The ruler of this area

was called "Kappalur vanathirayar". The period was 1264 C.E.

### **13. Srivaikundam inscription**

It was made during 33rd ruling period of SadayaVarman Sundara pandya. This inscription says about Ilayankudi and about Gangai pillai vanathirayar. Ilayankudi was called "Indravathara nallur" in ancient time (ARE 306/949-60).

### **14. Inscription of pandya territory**

Most of the inscriptions available in Ramanathapuram, Sivagangai and Pudukkottai Districts depict only one Vanathirayar. His name is "Sundaratholudaya vanathirayar".

### **15. Thirumaliruncholai Mavali Vanathirayan (C.E. 1428-1477)**

He had contributed a grinding stone (Ammikkal) to the Alagarkoil temple. In the stone, his name is found. He made Alagarkoil as the capital of his kingdom and his name is inscribed in "Thadikombu" inscription also. His inscriptions are till today exist in the places following Srivilliputhur, Mangudi, Alagarkoil sevalur, Karaiyur, Poovalaikkudi, Dindigul and Thadikkumbu.

### **16. Kalayarkoil inscription**

It says about Thirumaliruncholai Mavali Vanathirayar or Sundaratholudaya Mavali Vanathirayar. His other inscription are found in marava country village like,

- 1.Visayankudi C.E.1510
- 2.Thiruppullani C.E.1518
- 3.Devipattinam C.E.1533

Thus, the history of Vanathirayars in Tamil Nadu especially in pandya country is written on the basis of inscriptional record.

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