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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PERSPECTIVES OF EPIGRAPHICAL EVIDENCE OF NARASINGAPURAM

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Abstract

Narasingapuram is situated on the Chennai – Arakkonam National highways, Sriperumbudur Taluk, Thiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu. The village is embellished with an ancient temple named Lakshmi Narasimha Perumal temple. The temple is adorned with fourteen inscriptions pertaining to the dynasties of the Chola and Vijayanagar periods. The ancient name of the village was Madhurantaka Nallur and the temple name was Madhurantaka Vinnagar Alvar. The village was under the administrative division such as Kunrur Nadu, a subdivision of Manavir Kottam in Jayankondacholamandalam. The inscriptions glimpse unique information like the Consecration of the shrines to various Gods and Goddesses in the temple, a variety of dishes and ingredients, various taxes, coins, etc. An elaborate analysis has been made in this article to focus on the Historical Perspectives of Narasingapuram village as gleaned from the Inscriptions.

Key words: Inscriptions, Manavir kottam, Antrayam, Vedas, and Puranas

Introduction

Narasingapuram is a small village of Perambakkam situated on the Chennai – Arakkonam National highways, Sriperumbudur Taluk, Thiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu. It is 55 km. from Chennai City. The village is embellished with an ancient temple named Lakshmi Narasimha Perumal temple.¹ The temple is adorned with fourteen inscriptions about the dynasties of the Chola and Vijayanagar periods.² The

temple has been dilapidated and renovated recently.³ The inscriptions found in the temple precincts, throw light on the political influence, Socio–Economic conditions, and Cultural history of the village in the ancient period. An elaborate analysis has been made in this article to focus on the Historical Perspectives of Narasingapuram village as gleaned from the Inscriptions.

Name Derivation

The inscriptions of Kulottunga I and Vikrama Chola referred to the ancient name of the village as Madhurantaka Nallur and the temple name as Madhurantaka Vinnagar Alvar.⁴The village was under the administrative division such as Kunrur Nadu, a subdivision of Manavir Kottam in Jayankondacholamandalam. The lithic record of the Vijayanagara king Virapratapa Achyutayyadeva, mentions the village name as Periya-Puliyavi surnamed Narasimhapuram and a part of Kuvam alias Thyagasamudranallur (Narasayanayakkapuram)⁵and Virapratapa Sadasivadeva-Maharaya inscription refers to Kuvam alais Narasanayakkapuram, in kanrur nadu, a subdivision of Manavir kottam in the Chandragiri – rajayam.⁶

Madhurantaka Nallur, Madhurantaka was the title borne by the Chola kings Parantaka – I, Sundara Chola Rajendra I and the name Uttama Chola, it is evident that the village was named after the Chola king in the early period.⁷ Tyagasamudra was the title of Vikrama Chola thus it is called as Thyagasamudranallur.⁸ Narasa nayaka was the father Achyuta Raya, so during his time village is called as Narasa nayaka Puram after Vijayanagar ruler. In the course of time, the name Narasanayakkapuram was transformed into Narasimhapuram and Presently Narasingapuram. The term Nallur and Puram denotes the inhabitant area. The local people viewed that the village was called after the God Narashimar enshrined in the temple of Lakshmi Narashima Perumal.

Inscriptions

Of the fourteen inscriptions, six belong to Cholas and eight belong to the Vijayanagar period. The earliest lithic record pertains to Rajakesarivarman alias

Kulottunga Choladeva I dated in his 34th regnal year, found on the south wall of the Nachchiyar shrine. Four inscriptions belong to him and one belongs to Vikrama Chola. Another eight inscriptions belong to the Vijayanagar period, Virapratapa Achyutayyadeva Maharaya, Virapratapa Sadasivadeva-Maharaya, Virapratapa Vira-Venkatapati- deva.

Consecration of the Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana shrine

Two lithic records of Kulottunga I dated in his 35th Regnal year, refer to the consecration of a shrine for Perumal, Piratti, Ilaiyalvar apparently for Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana in the temple of Madurantaka-Vinnagar in Madurantakanallur, in Kanrur-nadu, a subdivision of Manavir kottam. by a certain Vaniyan Pannan alais Tali Churaiyan Ciramadutan of Kadarangondacolapuram in Pasali-naḍu of the Manavir bottom.⁹

It is construed that the temple was earlier dedicated to Rama during the time of Kulottunga I, later the shire was converted into a subsidiary shrine for Amman (Nachchiyar) and the present main shrine was consecrated to Lakshmi Narasimha Perumal during Vijayanagar period honour of Narasa Raja.¹⁰

Food offerings and Dishes

Four epigraphs from Narasingapuram register the food and varieties of dishes. The inscription of Kulottunga I dated in his 34th regnal year records the sacred food offerings to the deities, in midday puja (*uttchi sandhi*). The inscriptions specify the amount of Paddy provided to each deity and the varieties of food offered as follows.¹¹

Offerings to the deity	A variety of dishes offered to the deities
Perumal – 4 nali of rice (<i>thiruvamuthu arisi</i>) ¹²	Vegetable rice (<i>kariyamudu</i>) - 2 Nali of Paddy
Pirattiyar – 2 nali of rice	Ghee Rice (<i>nei amudhu</i>) - 2 Nali of Paddy & Ghee 1 ulakku
Ilaiyalvar – 2 nali of rice	Curd rice (<i>Thayir amudhu</i>) - 1 nali
	Adaikai amudhu
	Areca nut (<i>verunkai</i>)-8 betel leaf (<i>vetrilai</i>) – 32

The inscription of Achyutaraya mentions the dish called *paniyaram*.¹³ Another inscription of Virapratapa Vira-Venkatapati- deva gives a variety of dishes as food offerings as

- *Dosaippadi - Amudhupadi (1 kuruni) - ulundu (black gram) – 1 Nali and oil – 1 ulakku*
- *Pongal Taligai - Amudhupadi kuruni – Payaru(2 nali –*
- *Thuvarai Tiruppaniyaram–1 kuruni - vellam (Jaggary) - 10 Palam*
- *Areca nuts (Pakku) – 100 and Sandal – 1 Palam.*¹⁴

Recitation of Vedas and Puranas

The inscription of Vijayanagara king Virapratapa Achyutayyadeva- Maharaja identifies the recitation of Vedas¹⁴ and *Puranas (Bhaktisanjivini)* in the temple of Lakshmi Narasimhamurthy by Brahmanas. Each one of the Vaishnava brahmanas was given a monthly remuneration of 3 *panams*, 3 kalams of paddy, Land, and two houses in the temple for reciting a *puranas*.¹⁵

Temple Officials [*Devaganmikal*]

Devakanmi means the Servant of the God, they were associated with the Temple administration. As gleaned from inscriptional sources, the supply of food offerings to the deity was entrusted to the servants of the temple (*devaganmikal*)¹⁶

Taxation

The lithic record of Kulottunga I¹⁷ and Virapratapa Sadasivadeva-Maharaya¹⁸ from Narasingapuram sketches Tax exemptions and the names of the various taxes such as *nirvillai, antrayam, vetti-muttaiyal, cillirai and chorumattu, makamai, sungam and al-amanji*. *Nirvillai* was a water tax, levied on land as a fee for using water for irrigation.¹⁹ *Antrayam, vetti-muttaiyal* was *land tax*. *cillirai* denote the land tax assessed on a small unit of land.²⁰ *chorumattu*, The term, *Coru-mattu*, was used to refer to tax on rice (*coru*) and bullock (*mattu*).²¹ *makamai, sungam, al-amanji - Amanji* was a tax demanded on a unit of land and it was meant for free labour, rendered

by the holders of the land. The service rendered to the State was also considered as a form of revenue.²² *Muttai-al* was related to the non-stop supply of free labour to the Government and it was a service term.²³

Coins

The lithic record of Kulottunga I Records a sale of 4000 *kulis* of land for a consideration of 30 *andrada narkasu (old coin)*. The epigraph of Virapratapa Vira-Venkatapati- deva, registers the gift of sixty-five gold pieces called *Venkaṭaraya-varagans (gold coin)* to regulate the festivals and the supply of scared food during the specified 14 festival days in the year and the daily services in the temple of Alagiyasingar at Kuvam Tyagasamudranallur alias Narasimhapuram.²⁴ Two lithic records of Virapratapa Achyuta dēva-Maharaya²⁵ refers to the 6 *panams and 3 panams* as remuneration.²⁶

Measuring Rod [*patinaru-cha-kol*]

Lands were measured by special rods called *kols*. The lithic record of Kulottunga I mentions the land measuring rod, *patinaru-cha-kol*.²⁷ The exact length of the rod used to survey the land. *patinaru-cha-kol* is a rod of 16 can(unit) probably with the length of 12 feet.²⁸

Remuneration and allowances

The inscriptions from Narasingapuram refer to the different kinds of remunerations and allowances such as money, housing, food, etc. The inscription of Virapratapa Achyuta dēva-Maharaya, registers Chingayan was appointed as the Temple watchman (*koil vasakaval*) of the temple of Lakshminarasimhamurti, for his services in the temple, he was assigned with one house, monthly remuneration of 6 *panams, a share* in the temple *prasadam*, and some share in the dishes (*Paniyaram*) from the temple. He was also given a daily allowance of one *ulakku* of oil for lightening a lamp (*vacal villaku*) in front of the temple gate. He has enjoyed all this as hereditary.²⁹

His other inscription denotes Brahmanas were given a monthly remuneration of 3 *panams* and 3 *kalams* of paddy. In addition to this, they shall receive

a daily allowance of some specified quantity of sacred food (*prasadam*), *betel* leaves, and a monthly quota of sandal.³⁰ Another inscription assigns an allowance of money, food, etc., to certain Brahmans for the recitation of the Vedas.³¹

Endowment and distribution of village land

The inscription of Vijayanagar king Virapratapa Achyutayyadeva Maharaya, Records the gift of the village of Periya-Puliyavi surnamed Narasimhapuram and a part of Kuvam alias Thyagasamudranallur (Narasayanayakkapuram) in Kanrur Nadu, a subdivision of Tenkarai Manavir Kottam in Jayankondachola valanadu, for the merit of the king by an agent of his named Tittara-Pillai, on the occasion of the consecration of the image of Lakshminarasimha- murti in the temple.

The land in the village was divided into 29 shares as land and House (*manai*) and distributed among the *Brahmanas*, *talaiyari*, and *sthanaththar* of the temple.³²

Signatories

The term, ‘Signatory’ means signing authority who serves as a witness for land transactions and donations. The lithic record registers the signatories such as³³

- *Karanathan manaethi eluthu*
- *Madhurantaka villuparayan eluthu*
- *Karumudi sankankali eluthu*
- *Irunganur kilavan Rajasundra vairamegan eluthu*
- *Irunganur kilavan Maadeva kaliyarusalamudayan eluthu*
- *Kumaranthaka seranandi eluthu*
- *Paadalankilavan devanthiran eluthu*
- *Kizhan thalimalai madevadikal eluthu.*

Water Resource

Agriculture was the backbone of South India. Cultivation was based on seasonal rains. People greatly suffered when the rains failed. Hence the rulers of the Medieval Period gave importance to providing irrigation facilities.³⁴ The epigraphs give a glimpse of these water sources. *kileri* flowed in the village

Narasingapuram, part of Kanrur Nadu. This *Kileri* denotes the *Kuvameri*. The record also makes clear if the Madhurantaka Nallur lands are to be irrigated the water should flow through this *eri*.³⁵

Conclusion

The article entitled “Perspectives of Epigraphical Evidence of Narasingapuram” has brought to the limelight certain remarkable results which are sketched in a nutshell here. Starting from the historic period, the inscriptions from the Narasingapuram throw light on the political influence of Cholas and Vijayanagar. Further epigraphs reveal the social interactions and involvement of various groups of people. As far as economic condition is concerned, the epigraphs provide an idea of focusing on the derivation of the revenue to the village from land transactions such as land purchase and sale with the exemption of various taxes. An elaborate analysis of the epigraphs in Narasingapuram made in this article brings out the historical, cultural, epigraphic, and monumental wealth of the place to the limelight.

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