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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**A NOTE ON THE TRADE AND TRADE GUILDS MADE ENDOWMENTS TO THE TEMPLES IN
MEDIEVAL TAMIL COUNTRY**

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Abstract

The Trade Guilds were the members of a corporate assembly. The inscriptions register the actions taken by the *Sabha*, *Ur* and *Nagaram*. These three worked together to manage the local temple as well. The Guilds involved in domestic trade and also performed judicial functions. The Guild also formulated rules and regulations to be followed by the communities. The *Nagarattar* Guild assisted the King in executing the letter's order. Thus, they played a prominent role in socio-economic, religious, administrative, and judicial affairs. This paper portrays the role played by the traders and trade guilds for the development of the temple through epigraphs.

Keywords: *Sabha*, *Ur*, *padiyilar*, *Nagaram*, *Valangai* and *kārāṇmai*

Introduction

A (Tamil) inscription 1 found on the west wall of the kitchen the madapalli in the Tiruvaludiśvara temple of Pandya Māravarman alias Tribhuvana Chakravartin Sundara Pandyaadēva who is none other than Sundara Pāṇḍya I who was pleased to take the Chōla Country in his 4th regnal year (A.D 1220.) records a gift of sheep made by a *padiyilar* of the temple named Nakkan Ulagudaiyal alias Dēvagalsundara Talaikkōliyār, for four perpetual lamps before the image of the deity set up in the temple by Nakkan Pillaiyālvi alias Nānādēsi Talaikkōliyār, another *padiyilar* of the temple. The expression

Nānādēsi Talaikkōliyār clearly reveals the trade guild existed in Pandya Country during the time of Sundra Pandya I and the word *padiyilar* also came to known as traders of the Pandya Country likes *nagarattars*. The record makes mention a gift of livestock made by a woman known as Nakkan Ulagudaiyal alias Dēvagalsundara Talaikkōliyār for burning four perpetual lamps.

A (Tamil) inscription2 found on the south wall of the central shrine in Tiruvaludiśvara temple of Pandya Māravarman alias Tribhuvana Chakravartin Sundara Pandya I who presented the Chola Country in his 9th regnal year (c. A.D. 1225) records a sale of land

at Vaḍakkāṇam by the Valangai Mahāśēnai of the place of the God Kunramerinda pillaiyar the lord Subramanya. The document is signed by a representative of each of the eight regiments of the Valangai Mahāśēnai army. The record clearly states that an endowment of land after the sale given by Valangai Mahāśēnai the famous trade guild of the Tamils. The expression Valangai Mahāśēnai army inferred that the trade guilds had guards to protect their trade activities.

A (Tamil) inscription³ found on the west wall of the kitchen in the Tiruvaludīśvara temple of Pandya Māāravārman alias Tribhuvana Chakravartin Sundara Pāṇḍya I (c. A.D. 1216) seems to record the grant of the tenancy right *kārāṇmai* over the land and house site mentioned in ARE. No. 229 of 1932-33 to four persons who had purchased it from the big regiment Perumpadai by the authorities of the temple on certain specified conditions. The document is signed among others by Nānādēsi Talaikkōli and two other Padiyilār.

This record makes mention the grant of the tenancy right over the land and house site to four persons. The expression *kārāṇmai* clearly reveals that the grant of the tenancy right. The word Nānādēsi Talaikkōli states that the famous trade guild existed in Pandya Country during the time of Sundara Pandya I. An 11th century inscription at Tenkarai in Madurai refers to a Kozhikode district, mentions the privileges granted to Ayirattainnurruvar.⁷³ It was because of the activities of the merchants' Guilds, there was a marked increase in the trade activities of the Guilds from the 6th to the 14th century. They established their dominance even in foreign countries. All this resulted in increased foreign trade in the Tamil Country. Guilds enjoyed their powers in the Tamil Country and exercised their commercial supremacy in many commercial and market centers in the Tamil Country. They were also busy in coastal areas like Mamamallapuram, Mayilappur Nagapattinam, Tondi, Ramnad and regions. They expanded their business activities to show less dependence on royal support and patronage. In Tuvarankurichi⁷⁴ and Kovilpatti,⁷⁵ Piranmalai,⁷⁶ Korramangalam⁷⁷, the Ainnurvar exercised their authority to impose and tax local temples on merchandise passing through the region. In

many places they collected taxes. The rulers gave them many privileges and powers. Besides commerce, they also participated in multidimensional works such as charity, social welfare, judicial, endowment of temples, etc. They contributed a lot to the development of the economy in the Tamil Country of the medieval period.

There is enough evidence of Valanjiyar and its constant movement in the Tamil Country. They traded with merchants from other countries. The reference to the Valanjiyar of Tiruppurambiyam¹⁰⁶ clearly indicates the mobility of itinerant traders in this region. Trade items could have included fabrics, gems and other luxury items, coconuts, fruits, flowers, areca nuts, betel, frankincense oil, and butter. The Valanjiyar were given certain powers and privileges such as the patron of the stray dogs. Some of the stray dogs were named after him as Nanadesi, Valanjiyar, and Danmadavala dogs for their protection.¹⁰⁷ A Valanjiyar chief from Iluppoiur lived in a place called Pandiperunderu enjoyed several powers and privileges from the state. The trade Guilds were permitted even to live in settlements with broad streets. Apart from their position, profession and functions as merchants, they seem to have held a supreme position in the society and lived among the great number of professional bodies in the capital city, port town and so on. They also held a respectable position in society. Further they were permitted to made endowments to the temple and even empower to installed the idol of Lingpurandeva in 1224 A.D.¹⁰⁸ In many market centers the Nagarattars played an important role. They acted as members of the local assembly and had more powers and privileges. An inscription in Turaiyur defines the boundaries of a gift of land as the enclosed walls of the Ur and the backyards of the local business community.¹⁰⁹ The Guilds involved in domestic trade and also performed judicial functions. The Guild also formulated rules and regulations to be followed by the communities.¹¹⁰ The Nagarattar Guild assisted the King in executing the letter's order.¹¹¹ Thus, they played a prominent role in socio-economic, religious, administrative, and judicial affairs.

Services

Anjuvannam was also a unique merchant Guild. This trade Guild had undeniable evidence regarding the trade. The term Anjuvannam was first noticed on the Chera copper plates.⁴² They were the semi-independent business corporation.⁴³ They were the service communities.⁴⁴

Temple

The Nagarattar were the members of a corporate assembly called the Nagaram. An inscription registers the actions taken by the *Sabha*, Ur and Nagaram. These three worked together to manage the local temple.¹¹² The Nagarattar organized a *Variyam* and when a royal official was inspecting the local temple records, a meeting of the *Variyam* was called to assist the royal official.¹¹³ In Kanchipuram a *Managaravaniga* association with an annual supervisory committee oversaw the administration of a local temple, which was under the jurisdiction of Kanchipuram maNagaram.¹¹⁴ The Nagaram was held collectively responsible for the collection of tax revenue from his domain and handled its internal assessments. Thus, a Melappaluvur inscription in the Tiruchirappalli district records that a Chetti represented the Nagaram in a negotiation over taxes owed to the Chola Government.¹¹⁵ In a twelfth-century inscription, the Nagaram of Rajendra Singapuram (Vedaranyam) was a testimonial for collecting all kinds taxes namely Antaryam (Usually a royal tax that is levied on local assemblies), Kudimai (a royal tax), Koyirramperu (a royal tax payable to temples) and Nagarvibiyogam (a local tax collected to support the spending of the Nagaram. Thus the trade Guilds enjoyed some powers and privileges.

A Valanjiyar chief from Iluppoiur lived in a place called Pandiperunderu enjoyed several powers and privileges from the state. The trade Guilds were permitted even to live in settlements with broad streets. Apart from their position, profession and functions as merchants, they seem to have held a supreme position in the society and lived among the great number of professional bodies in the capital city, port town and so on. They also held a respectable position in society.

Further they were permitted to made endowments to the temple and even empower to installed the idol of Lingpurandeva in 1224 A.D.¹⁰⁸ In many market centers the Nagarattars played an important role. They acted as members of the local assembly and had more powers and privileges. An inscription in Turaiyur defines the boundaries of a gift of land as the enclosed walls of the Ur and the backyards of the local business community.¹⁰⁹ The Guilds involved in domestic trade and also performed judicial functions. The Guild also formulated rules and regulations to be followed by the communities.¹¹⁰ The Nagarattar Guild assisted the King in executing the letter's order.¹¹¹ Thus, they played a prominent role in socio-economic, religious, administrative, and judicial affairs.

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