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RESEARCH ARTICLE

CHRONOLOGY THROUGH TIRUVANNAMALAI ARUNACHALEESHWARA TEMPLE INSCRIPTIONS

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Abstract

The word “epigraphy” is derived from two greek words ‘epi’ + graphy. The word “epi” meaning on or Upon and “graphie” meaning to write. And hence, epigraphy is the study of writings engraved on stone, metal and other materials like wood, shell etc., known as “Inscriptions” or epigraphs. Inscritptions play a vital role in constructing the history. It is also considered as the main evidence in shaping the historical thesis. By analyzing these inscriptions, we can piece together the Chronological history of a particular region. Therefore the chronology of Tiruvannamalai region was quested by analyzing the inscriptions available in Tiruvannamalai Temple Premises in this study.

Keywords: Chronology, Inscritptions, Lord Arunachaleeshwara, Chola, Vijayanagar Kingdom

Introduction

Chronology refers to the arrangement of events or dates in the order in which they occurred. It involves organizing and sequencing historical or chronological information in a timeline or chronological order, allowing us to understand the progression of events over time.

Chronology through inscriptions

Chronology through inscriptions is a method used by archaeologists and historians to establish dates

and understand the historical timeline of events and civilizations. Inscritptions, which can be found on various surfaces like stone, metal, clay or paper, often contain valuable information such as dates, names and significant events. By deciphering these inscriptions and analyzing their content, researchers can piece together the chronological history of a particular region or culture. This method is particularly important for studying ancient civilizations where written records may be scare or nonexistent.

Tiruvannamalai Arunachaleeshwara Temple

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Thiruvannamalai is an important Saivite centre of Tamilnadu, famous for its impressive and historic temple of Arunachaleswara. During the Karthigai festival the entire Annamalai hill will be lit up with thousands of lights. The hill is appropriately called in Sanskrit as Arunachala – or the Hill of Fire. The lord is worshipped here as the very incarnation of Fire, anelement of Nature. The vast temple complex at the foot of the hill is one of the largest of its kind in Tamilnadu and contains a number of inscriptions throwing valuable light on the history of the place.

Chronology through Tiruvannamalai Arunachaleeshwara Temple Inscriptions

The Tiruvannamalai temple, also known as the Annamalaiyar Temple, is a renowned Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Siva, located in the town of Tiruvannamalai in Tamilnadu, India. It is famous for its historical inscriptions that provide valuable insights into the temple's history and the cultural and religious development of the region.

There is a large number of epigraphs on the stone walls of this temple, many of which have been read and published by the Department of Epigraphy. About 505 of these epigraphs are now made available by the above Department in its Annual Report of French Institute of Pondicherry published in 1990.¹ The epigraphs on the walls are not in chronological order; later ones are found alongside earlier ones in many places and some of the inscriptions relating to the construction of a particular building or the like are not found on that building. Why that is so is not clear. The inscriptions available so far relate to periods of Pallavas, Cholas, Rashtrakutas, Kadavarayas, Panas, Sambhuvarayas, Pandyas, Poshalas, Vijayanagar rulers and the Nayaks. The available inscriptions in the temple so far can be assigned on the basis of their nature and the information they express to the periods of the various dynasties and the rulers as detailed below.²

01. Pallavas	– 01
02. The Cholas	– 181
03. Rashtrakutas	– 02
04. Katavarayas	– 31
05. Panas	– 13
06. Sambhuvarayas	– 43

07. Pandyas	- 34
08. Poshalas	- 09
09. Vijayanagar Empire	- 135
10. The Nayaks	- 16
11. Fragments Inscriptions	- 40 (Unidentified)

Total 505

Apart from these 505 inscriptions, 8 more copper plates have also been discovered in the premises of the temples. Out of 505, inscriptions 213 are very much useful in giving the information where as others (292) are giving partial information to construct the history of Sri Arunachaleeshwara Temple of Tiruvannamalai. The major information of the inscriptions are about the donations to the temple by the Kings, Royals and the Public. Most of the epigraphs record the gifts of gold, Jewellery, gold and silver utensels, lamps, sheeps and goats, cows and bulls and lands to defray the expenses of conduction the daily pujas or worship or of special worships such as “*Utchavas*”, the lighting of lamps, the salary of servants, the feeding of the devotees and the poor or of such things as expiation of the sin of accidental homicide or a prayer for the merit of the departed soul of a notable person. In some inscriptions are noted curses on those who fail to carry out the purposes for which the gifts are made. In some are recorded praises of the king or chieftain, composed by men and who received patronage or active kindness from them. There is only one inscriptions of the Pallavaperiod, the earliest one is that of the Chola king dated 849 A.D. This temple, however was in existence in Thondaimandalam, a part of the Pallava empire.³

The Pallavas had to fight with the Chalukyas and the Pandyas from the beginning of the 7th century. In the 8th century they had also to fight with Rashtrakutas. This was the beginning of the Pallava decline and when the king Aparajitha Pallava came to power, there were dissensions over the Pallavas succession which led to the disloyalty among the petty rulers (feudatories). The cholas, with Vijayalaya as their leader took advantage of the weak state of affairs and became independent by defeating the Pallava king Aparajitha. Thondaimandalam thus came under the

Chola authority. Aditya, the son of Vijayalaya, made Pallavas his feudatories and the Cholas as of old succeeded in establishing themselves in the south as a leading power.

The earliest of the inscriptions are on the walls of the central shrine which is the oldest stone edifice of the temple. Two of them refer to the 3rd and 4thregnal years of the Chola king Vijayalaya, who ruled from 846 to 880 AD. The earliest epigraph is on the south wall and this may have been inscribed in the year 849 AD.⁴ Inscriptional sources refer to the period as 13thregnal year of AdityaChola and it may have been inscribed in the year 893 AD.⁵ Since the usual reckoning of the regnal years in those days was from the time of assuming power as Viceroy or Crown prince, this epigraph may have been inscribed actually in the year 859 AD which event is 13 years after Vijayalaya and his son jointly assumed authority in the new Chola kingdom. This epigraph is found on the floor near Temple tree side of the temple area. Another old epigraph, inscribed in 922 AD refers to the 15thregnal years of Parantaka I and is to be found on the west wall of the central shrine of the temple.⁶

There are two epigraphs found on the south wall of the central shrine of the temple relating to the 3rd and 4thregnal year of AdityaChola II. According to these inscriptions AdityaChola II beheaded the Pandya King. They may have been inscribed in 961 and 969 AD respectively. It is likely that the event took place when the Pandya king invaded the Chola country

There are four inscriptions referring to the 18th and 19thregnal years of Rajendra Chola. They were perhaps inscribed in the years 1029 to 1031 A.D respectively. One of the epigraphs refers to his 4thregnal year in which is recorded the gift of lands by Arapur Odeya Gangadevar Kannadai Perumal. This Gangadeva is evidently the Ganga King who was defeated by Rajendra and the gift was made in A D 1015. This epigraph is on the south wall of the Ekambaranathar Shrine.⁷

Rajaraja Chalukya usurped the Chola throne in 1074 AD and he reigned under the name of Kulottunga I until 1118 AD.⁸

There are three inscriptions referring to Rajadhiraja II, who succeeded Rajaraja II. Two of these were inscribed in 1175 and 1178 respectively and are found on the south and west walls of the Chidambareshwara Shrine. There are 26 inscriptions referring to the Period of Kulotunga III from his 2ndregnal year to 35thregnal years. There was a severe famine during his reign in parts of the Chola country, particularly round about Arunachala. The epigraph 151 of Kulotunga III explains magnificent gifts were given to Sri Arunachaleshwara and the names of some of the donors and their gifts and the dates of donation are mentioned. According to the inscriptions, donations are made from the period 1180 AD to 1196 AD.

According to the inscription, it is known that there was trouble brewing in the latter part of the reign of Kulotunga III and the trouble continued during the reign of Rajaraja III, the Chola king ascended the throne in 1216 AD and he is said to have ruled for 35 years.

Perunjinga, who was waiting for the chance marched against the king in 1221 AD defeated him at Tellaru, imprisoned him and his ministers and took possession of the country to which Tiruvannamalai belonged. There are 14 inscriptions relating to the reign of Perunjinga in this temple covering a period of 36 years. In 1231 AD, the Hoysala king Narasimha II defeated Perunjinga and replaced Rajaraja on his throne. In spite of this epigraphs of Perunjinga with his titles as Sovereign continued to appear on the walls of the temple along with those referring to Rajaraja III.¹ One of the 14 inscriptions says that Perunjinga gave to Sri Arunachaleshwara ear ornaments, a crown set, with gems, Prabhavati, Kalapahavriksha, Pearl bedecked canopy, cot bedecked with rubies and diamonds. Some of the gifts to the temple during the reign of Perunjinga period are donated from the period 1242 AD to 1269 AD^{10, 11}

Coming back to the period of Rajaraja III, we find about 21 inscriptions referring to his reign. The first is dated 1221 AD which is his fifth regnal year and in that it is recorded that two persons

Kumararayanan Marundan and Alagiya Chola Muttianden, pledge themselves with oaths, never to leave the service of Prithvi Gangarayan and his officials.

Tirupati Jayabalan Tondan, son of Mananjeri. Kodachariar Devanral, gave 10,000 coins for repairs to the temple in 1233 AD. Komalavalli, daughter of Vilvarayan Odeyar of Kalahasti, made provision for a perpetual lamp in 1233 in the temple. Virachola Attimallan Sambhuvaraya Ayyan Edirill Sambhuvarayan gave cattle for the maintenance of temple. Another very interesting information says that Mangaiyarkarasi and her brother repaired all tanks round about Tiruvannamalai in 1236 AD. Sedirayan Odeyar of Tiruvannamalai, gave lands in 1237 AD. Vena Odeyar Younger brother of Solakon, a Mudali of Perunjinga gave cattle, on 12.12.1245 AD.

The inscription refers to 7th, 16th and 20th regnal years of Maravarman Kulasekara II i.e. 1275, 1284 and 1288 respectively. Another inscriptions dated 1334 AD perhaps of Maravarma Sri Vallabha who ascended the Panya throne in 1312 AD says that the Pandya ruler was on friendly terms with Hoysala king Vira Ballala III.

The Chola country passed into the hands of the Hoysala Vira Ballala. There are two inscriptions which refer to his reign. According to the inscription which is assigned 4th January 1341 AD records the gift of 1700 Kuzhi lands near NattanEri, on the South bank of the river Cheyyar in Agharam Pallipadi (Polur Taluk).

There are over 13 epigraphs pertaining to the Vijayanagar period in the temple covering over two centuries 1374 to 1578 AD including those of the Nayaks of Tanjore who were subordinate to the Vijayanagar kings. It is proved that with the epigraphs at least four ruling kings of the Vijayanagar visited the temple and they are Purdha Deva Raya, Vira Narasimha, Krishna Devaraya and Achyuta Raya.² The earliest epigraph in the temple referring to Vijayanagar rule is that of Jammanna Odeyar and is dated 17th December 1374 AD. The next epigraph is dated the 30th June 1377 AD referring to the reign of

Harianna Odeyar (Harihara II, 1376-1404 AD) records the grant of paddy, cloth and 600 coins annually to the Vallala Gopura Subrahmanya for Pujas.¹³

Three other inscriptions of Vira Viruppanna Odeyar son of Harihara II. One is dated 1st January 1389 AD in which is recorded the gifts of lands for "Veda Adhyayana" on the day of the "Shraddha" ceremony for the merit of Kamparaya or Kampanna. The second is dated 22nd June 1388 AD recording remission of taxes on temple lands. The third on which is dated 8th October 1389 AD records the gift of lands to the temple.¹⁴

There are two inscriptions referring to the rule of Vira Vijaya Bhupati Raya, son of Vira Deva Raya I. One of them is dated 5th January 1413 AD and refers to a gift of cattle by Annadata Odeyar, a minister of Bhupati Raya and the other dated 7th December 1418 AD records the order of Vijaya Bhupati Raya that no distinction must be made in Tiruvannamalai between the so called right hand and left hand sections of people.

There is one epigraph which refers to the reign of king Mallikarjuna (1449 – 1465 AD). It is dated 8th July 1450 AD and records the gift of a village to the temple by Kondijenri Vaniar Alaga Perumal Tirumudali Odeyar. There are three epigraphs relating to the reign of king Krishna Devaraya (1506 - 1530 AD). The first is dated to 16th July 1510 AD which records gifts of lands to Virupakshadeva for Kodai Maniam by Veera Singa Deva son of Koner Nayaka. The second and third are by Krishna Deva Raya himself, one in Tamil and the other in Telugu. They are dated 6th January 1516 AD.

These are two epigraphs relating to the period of Vira Sadasiva Raya (1542 – 1570). One is dated 27th July 1567 recording the orders of the King that no taxes are to be levied on the lands given by Chera, Chola and Pandya kings, Hoysala, Ballala Raja, Somayya Dandanaya and Vira Achyuta Raya to the Devadasis living in the eastern and Western streets. The other is dated 7th September 1548 AD recording a gift of land and cash for the purchase of civet for pujas. According to another epigraph of 1572 AD is

in the verse form praising Sevvappa Nayak and the eleven storeyed Gopura.¹⁵ Another epigraph mentions which is assigned the date as of 1574 AD the name of Sri Ranga Deva, king of Vijayanagar (1574-1586 AD), as the over lord and says that the eleven storeyed Gopura was built by Sevvappa Nayak.¹⁶ One more epigraph of 1572 AD records that Sevvappa's son Achyuta Nayak installed golden pinnacles on the top of the Gopura.¹⁷ Vijayanagar ruler Sri Ranga Deva is mentioned in an inscription dated 1574 AD which mentions one Sivanesan and Annaiappa Pillay were the treasurers of the temple.¹⁸ Another inscription mentions the reign of Venkata Deva alias Venkata I king of Vijayanagar (1586-1666) AD and records takes fixed on the Manradis living in the eastern street.¹⁹

Conclusion

Inscriptions, which are found on Tiruvannamalai Arunachaleswara Temple walls, pillars, and various structures, offer a chronological record of donations, grants and events associated with the temple. They often include details such as the names of donors, dates, and the purpose of the donations. Historians and archaeologists study these inscriptions to establish the temple's chronology as well as Tiruvannamalai region, trace the evolution of

its architecture and religious practices, and understand the socio-political context of the times.

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