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Socio - Economic Attributes of Nagarathars

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Abstract

The paper discusses the various trade and mercantile activities of Nagaraththar community since the 3rd century BCE. By highlighting the various issues relating to trade and guilds the author furnishes the relation between the term Nagarram and Nagaraththar. Further various place names of the ancient period have been studied and the present name of those places is mentioned. The Nagaraththar settlement in the Chettinadu region is well understood in this discussion. Also, the names of various highways, transit routes, and trade routes are mentioned.

Keywords: Nagarram, Nagaraththar, Pattinam.

Introduction

Nattukkottai Nagaraththar is living in large numbers in 78 villages as nine groups according to their temple affiliation in present-day Sivagangai and Pudukkottai districts. They are migrated from Naganadu to Kanchipuram, from Kanchipuram to Pumpuhar and Pumpuhar to present day Chettinadu. The reason for the migration might be sea-erosion or atrocities by the ruling kings. But this theory of migration is argued and a new theory is put forth by historian R.Balakrishnan. According to him, the Nattukkottai Nagaraththar originally migrated from the Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa regions. Then they migrated via Gujarat, Andhra, and Karnataka and settled at Kanchipuram. Again, they migrated to Pumpuhar and finally reached the present-day area adjoining Chettinadu. He furnished 133 village names similar to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Gujarat, and Karnataka. This new theory needs to be further corroborated with archaeological shreds of evidence.

Nagaram

The word Nagaram literally means a town where a large population of people live an urban life. But this word has a special meaning in the commercial connection a busy centre of Nagaraththar that engaged in various types of business activities. Nagarathar (malai or hill) is also known as Narthamalai situated in the Pudukkottai district. During the reign of Rajaraja Chola-I period this hill was renamed Thelingakulakalapuram. The suffix puram also denotes a commercial centre. In course of time, the society had become much more complex and one more dimension was added to it by the third institution known as Nagaram which emerged in the 8th century C.E. The other two institutions already existed were brahmadeya and ur. The Nagaraththar were the members of the Nagaram and thus came to be a generic term for all Tamil merchants especially, a name by which the Chettiyar community of the Nathukkottai region such as the present Sivangai and Pudukkottai areas are known to this day. Hence, it can be inferred that the residents of Nagaram are called Nagaraththar. At present this term means only to the Chettiar community people.

In 804 C.E Brahmins also involved in the trade were called Nagaraththar. Further, it revealed that the term Nagaram or Nagaraththar denotes all merchants without any caste identity. Moreover, in Thiruchendur, one Nagaraththar resident of Manavirapattinam had donated 120 kasus for the expenses of food offerings at Subramanya temple. In the same manner number of Nagaraththar had donated many temples nearby their settlement areas. Many Nagarams were created during the 11-12th century C.E. because due to the increase in trade activities. The whole country was divided into valanadus and nadus. Each nadu consists of 6 villages. Among them, one nagaram was established. For instance, the names of six such nagarams are cited below.

1. Keralasinga Valanattu Aruvimanagaram alias kulasekara pattinathu nagarathom
2. Keralasinga Valanattu Alagapuramana Cheliya narayana purathu nagarathom
3. Duvavapathi nattu eripadai nallur Vadamattai Nagarathom
4. Ayyapolil Valanatu kalvayil nattu Sundara pandya purathu nagarathom
5. Kodumbalur Manigramathu Nagarathom
6. Thirukkottiyur Maniyambalathu Nagarathom.

All the above-mentioned nagaram incorporated the Nagaraththar community and they lived in the Nattukottai region. There are a few exceptions such as one Duvarapathi nadu in Natham region of the Dindigul district. These nagaraththars functioned as one group in their respective nadus. Further, they assembled fully for the Piranmalai conference to discuss the current issues and to arrive at a common decision.

Pattinam

The term pattinam is a Tamil word that directly refers to a seaport. For example, Kaviripumpattinam, Nagapattiam, Periyapattinam and Kayalpattinam. Kaviripumpattinam (Pumpuhar) was an emporium and Centerport acting as a collection centre perhaps comparable to being a gateway city to its hinterland. The guild inscriptions also refer to the area of operation covering 18 pattinams, 37 valarapurams and 64 kadigai thavalam. Hence, Pattinam was undoubtedly a town of considerable importance and

more often a seaport. Valarapuram would perhaps be a growing trade centre whereas thavalam refers to a fair. One cannot enumerate 18 pattinams and their actual locations. The number of pattinams increased during the reign of the later Pandya period, especially in the 12-13th centuries of C.E. The list includes the names such as Valuthi Valanattu Manavira Pattinam, Thondi alias Pavithramanicka Pattinam. Manalmel kudiya kulothunga cholapattinam, Sundara Pandya Pattinam, Pasi pattinam, Ilangomangalam alias Ullagamadevi Pattinam Pavithiramanicka Pattinam (Periya Pattinam) Kayal Pattinam, Sonadukonda Pattinam Veerapandya Pattinam and Kulasekara Pattinam. All these pattinams had commercial contact with China and Arabian countries. Importing horses from the Arabian countries was the main trade activity in these Pattinams.

Dalam, Eriveera Dalam, Eripadainallur, Erivira Pattinam

When the Chetti merchants travelled by road for long-distance trade with their goods on donkeys or horses they had some special security guards for their protection. They are variously named Erivirar, Munaivirar, virakodiyar, porkkodivirar, Ilanchingam, Chettimakkal, and Chettiputhiran. They were guarded by the armed men who followed them throughout their journey. Dalam means a protected place or centre. Eriviradhalam means the centre protected by Erivirar. Erivirapattinam were more in the nature of protected towns for stocking merchandise and could well have been distribution points protected collectively by the merchant body. It is not clear where the Erivira Pattinams were protected by a defensive wall, for evidence of these settlements, would merely indicate the presence of militant groups of the merchant bodies. Erivirapattinam or chartered mercantile towns begin to appear only in the 11th-century to the need to create warehouses for merchant groups on major trade routes. In Pandya country such Erivirapattinam were found at Natham, Samuthirapatti, Athur, Periyakulam, Idaivali, Thiruvailisvaram, Sirumali and Malapatti. These towns are located on the main highways linking Pandyanadu and Cholanadu and again connecting the Pandyanadu with the Kongu Cheranadus.

Samuthirapatti Erivirapattinam was created during the reign of Vikrama Chola Pandya in the 11th century CE. It was established by the already existing Alagiya Pandya Peruniraviyar associated with Thisai Ayirathu Aynuruvar with the association of other traders. This body convened a meeting under a tamarind tree called Aynurruvar puli and with the concession of all the aynnuruvar groups. It is to be noted that Erivirapattinam was established at Samuthirapatti. The place where the armed guards reside was known as Eripadainallur. In Pandyanadu Periyakulam and Natham villages are known as Eripadainallur. The Eripadainallur was otherwise known as Eriviradhalam and it was protected by armed guards. In another instance, Virakodiyar by name Periyakulam Eripadai nallur was converted into an EriviraPattinam and renamed Alangulam alias Desi Erivira Pattinam. During the 13th century C.E. Aruppukkottai Sri Vallabhapperumtheru has been converted and named Desi Erivirapattinam. Thirumal uhanthankottai. Further, an important trade centre located on the route between Arupukkottai and Sayalkudi was known as Idaivali alias Erivarapattinam.

Pattinapakuthi and Pattanaswamy

Pattanaswamy, the word literally means leader or head of a Pattanam. In Karnataka, the entire administration of a particular patinam was carried on by a pattanaswamy along with the help of merchant bodies and other local non-commercial groups. In Tamilnadu, the Pattanaswamy will preside over the meetings of the merchant bodies and other local groups. However, references to Pattanaswamy who along with the members of the pathinervisaya levies cess on merchandise at Piranmalai. The cess was called as Pattanapakuthi or Mahanmai. During the period of Kulothunga Chola-I in Irukkanthurai, a newly discovered seaport, one water tank is named Pattanaswamy kulam.

Perankadi and Peruntheru

During the 10th century C.E, in Pandyanadu individual establishments of the supermarket has been developed and they were named perankadi. The earliest Perankadi in Pandyanadu was known from Karavantapuram (Ukirankottai-Tirunellveli

district). During the 10th century, C.E Rajasimha-III established this perankadi and named as Rajashimha perankadi and appointed soldiers for its protection. Later on, this Perankadi had been developed by traders and it became Peruntheru, or a large market centre. Many such Peruntheru's are noticed in Pandyanadu inscriptions. One recent survey reveals that in Pandya country there were 37 Peruntherus or market places was existed from the 10th to 13th-century C.E. At Ponamaravathi one Aynuruvar Peruntheru is referred to in the Kulasekara's record.

Peruvazhi or Highway

Various cities and countries were connected by interlinking highways. The Tamil epic Silapathikaram mentions three different routes to reach Madurai from Kodumbalur. Among these three the centre road is known as Madurai Peruvazhi. These highways were useful to transit goods and merchandise for long distances. There are various resting places adjacent to the highways in the villages of Pandyanadu such as thavalam or adikilthatam, Piranmalai, Thuvarankurichi, Ponnamaravathi, Thirukostiyur, Thirumalai, Thithantapuram, Devipattinam, Athur, Kannarpatti, Sinnamanur, Maranthai and Ankamangalam. It is to be noted that there was proper protection provided for the travellers who used these highways. Similarly, in the Cholanadu route known as Kulanthuka Peruvazhi near Cholavanthan one traveller was attacked by a tiger, but he was saved by an armed guard named Virakodiyar. In this effort, the guard lost his life by saving the owner. Interestingly, the nagaraththar of this place endowed lands for his sacrifice attested by the epigraphic record.

Ariviyur Nagaraththar

This village Aruviyur is located in the name Kalappur in present-day Thirupathur Taluk of Sivagangai district. Aruviyur was again suffixed with Kulasekara pattinam and called Aruviyur alias Kulasekara pattinam. An inscriptional record at Virayachilai refers to four divisions among Aruviyur Nagarathar. Today only two divisions are known namely Southern valavu Nagaraththar and Northern Valavu Nagaraththars. In the 13th–14th century C.E. Aruviyur Nagaram was destroyed by fire, and

then the residents of Aruviyur settled at Kottar near Nagercoil in the present-day Kanyakumari district. Due to this, historical incident, they are called 'Kotarru Chettis. The southern Valavu Nagaraththar are now living at Singampunari, Karungalakudi, Kalapur and Muraiyur villages situated around Piranmalai. The northern valavu Nagaraththar are living in seven villages adjoining the Ponnamarapatti and Sirukudi areas. The southern valavu Nagaraththar consumes non-vegetarian food but the northern valavu nagaraththar adheres to vegetarianism. It is interesting to note that in between these two divisions there are no matrimonial relations that do exist even to this day.

Sundaracholapuram Nagaraththar

This village Sundaracholapuram is located 32 km southwest of Pudukkottai town. The traders living in this village are known as Sundarattu Chettis. There are several inscriptions that mention this village as Sundaracholapuram alias Desinkantha Pattinam which attests to the settlement of Aynurruvar guild. The number of inscriptions found in the Pudukkottai district mentions their various charitable activities.

Ilayanthankudi Nagaraththar Migration Of Sevalur

Among the nine Nagaraththar temples Ilayathankudi temple inscription records the first arrival and settlement of Chettis after they migrated from Pumpuhar. These Chettis were well honoured by the nearby village people and they were served as Judges and Jurist to settle disputes between villages. One such example is known from an inscription in Pudukkottai state. There was a dispute between the two villages Panaiyur and Kulamangalam regarding ownership of certain land. These lands were owned by Panaiyur temple authorities known as Arivisuvaramudaiya Nayanar and Thiruvengaikalisvara Nayanar of Malayakovil. The dispute arose at Vadapaththunadu near Ponnamarapathi. Moreover, prominent people from nearby villages were invited to hear and settle the issue. Among them, Ilayaththankudi Nagaraththar played a crucial role and settled the issue amicably. Further, three inscriptions at Sevalur relate to Ilayaththankudi nagaraththar. It is to be noted that

at present there is no Nagaraththar family living at Sevalur. All of them migrated to towns and cities for their business-related activities. According to one record dated 1458 C.E an agreement was reached between Ilayaththankudi Nagaraththar and Kalanivasal udaiyar Seliyatharaiyar Avudaiyar as the first party and Pandarathar, and Urar of Bhumisvaramudaiyar temple of Sevalur, the second party. The first mentioned two people had donated images of presiding deity Bhumisvaramudaiyar and Subramaniyar to this temple. During festival occasions, they were first honoured and thirty sites of plots to build houses were allotted for them. Among these thirty houses, twenty-eight plots were given to Ilayanththankudi Nagaraththar and the rest two sites were given to Kalanivasal Seliyatharaiyar Avudaiyar. It is understood from this record that Nagaraththar of Ilayaththankudi migrated and settled at Sevalur. These house sites were given to them as an honorarium for their philanthropic activities. Also, Seliyatharaiyar a sub-sect belongs to the Vairavan temple group.

Conclusion

From the 13th century CE onwards, these Nattukottai Chetti's business, as well as temple building and charitable activities, were started. They extended their business, particularly in South East Asian Countries and earned enormous money by which they built palatial mansions in their native village. There are nine temple groups that are considered exogamous people. They won't have a matrimonial relationship with the same temple group. Finally, to sum up, the discussion it is to be noted that the Nagaraththar are well known for their religious charitable activities and they established various educational institutions for the welfare of society.

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