

Activities of Merchant Guilds in Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri Districts

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Abstract

The corporate life in India had a very long history. The Vedic literature mentions the name ‘Srinis’ or ‘Nigama’ to denote mercantile guild. In Tamil Vanigar, Nagaram were used to denote it. The principal idea of establishing the guild was for benefit trading societies or small business associations further its formation was aimed to shield mutual concerns and preserve standards of morality or conduct. However, in due course the merchant guilds occupied in many activities such as military service, judicial service, religious function, Socio-religious function and secular functions. The Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri districts formed north-western bordering part of Tamil Nadu. This region though geographically defined as dry and socially and economically backward area most suited for pastoral life and economy; which gave less opportunity for mercantile activities. However the inscriptions of this region establish the mercantile guilds activities from 6th century CE. In this study a small attempt is made to reveal the functions of merchants of this region.

Keywords: Guilds, functions, Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri

Introduction

In there were evidences to establish the existence of corporate life or the activities of Merchant Gilds from the Vedic period. They were marked in the name ‘Srinis’ or ‘Nigamas’. It was undoubtedly the principal idea of establishing the guild was for benefit trading societies or small business associations further its formation was aimed to shield mutual concerns and preserve standards of morality or conduct. However, in due course the merchant guilds occupied in many activities such as military service, judicial service, religious function, Socio-religious function and secular functions. The Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri districts formed north-western borders of Tamil Nadu. In this study a small attempt is made to reveal the functions of merchants of this region.

The Guilds

Corporate life existed in ancient India ever since Vedic period; then, the guilds were known as ‘Srenis’ or ‘Nigamas’. The association of people of same trade and activity with an analogous skill and craft was known as guild. Its formation was aimed to shield mutual concerns and preserve standards of morality or conduct. Historically guilds were formed to benefit societies or small business associations. Merchant guilds occupied in many activities. The control of import and export of wares, the regulation of wages and prices, and the inspection and standardization of goods were some of the most important activities of the guild. We had lot of references to establish besides the merchant guilds also guilds for artisans, agriculturalists, different castes and even warriors. Through the history it was evident that the people of same caste were able to function as a group. When they tried to dip their toes into commercial activities, the assembly of certain groups evolved into merchant guilds. The main object of this study is to probe into organizational and functional aspects of important merchant guilds of Dharmapuri district.

In history South India and Tamil Nadu we came across names of many merchant guilds. Anjuvannam, Manigramam, Thisai Ayirathu Ainurtuvar, Nanadesi, Ayyavole, Valangiyar, and Nagaram guilds seem to have contributed significantly. The Anjuvannam was an exclusive group of Muslim traders. There were evidences to establish strong association or unity between these guilds. The Manigram was found to occur along with Anjuvannam in the copper plate of Sthanu Ravi. The Thisai Ayirathu Ainnuruvar and Nanadesi were identified as one merchant group as some inscriptions mention them as 'Thisai Ayirathu Ainnuruva Nanadesi'. The Ayyavole merchants claim their origin from a place called Aihole in western Deccan.

¹The inscriptions of Ayyavole mention the phrase 'five hundred swamis'. The same numerical figure keeps its appearance as a prefix to Mahajans as well. Neelakanda Sastri and Meera Abrahams equated the 'five hundred swami' i.e., Ainnuru swamis' to Ainnuruvar. However, apart from similarity in the numerical prefix; it was very difficult to conclude whether the Kannada 'Ainnuru swami' and Tamil 'Ainnuruvar' refer to same guild of merchants.

Guilds moved through 'Vathi' the narrow streets and 'Peru Vazhi', the highways to do business of their interest. In order to protect their goods from robberies they institute their own independent armies or guard organizations. References occur to such guard organizations in Tholkappiyam and Akananuru, Tamil ancient works. In inscriptions they were called 'Munai Virer', 'Peru Niraviyar', 'Kodi virar', 'Chetti virar', 'Eri virar', etc. They accompany with the traders where ever they go to carry out their duty of protecting goods and their masters.

The earliest reference to one such merchant warrior was from herostone inscription at Ganampatti in Uthangarai taluk, now part of Krishnagiri district. The 6th century inscription records the 27th regnal year of Simahvishnu and the herostone was erected in memory of the hero who died in the skirmish for retrieving the pig (hog) herd². Since he belong to the 'Vathi guard' of guilds; this type of here stone was known as 'Vathiselvan kal'.

1 Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Guilds of South India*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 1988, p.12.

2 Nagasamy. R., (ed), *Dharmapuri Inscription, Part-I*, State Department of Archaeology, Chennai, 1975, p. 74

The Hogenakkal Herostone Inscription

A fourteenth century herostone was discovered in July 1995 CE on the road side to Hogenakkal highways³. It was erected in memory of an Eriviror who defended the caravan of traders. Though the herostone did not bear any inscriptions; two slabs erected near the herostone bears inscription. Few phrases could be readable in the partially damaged inscription. '... Konda Chola', 'Ayirathu Ainnuru...' were found in first two lines. In all probability it refers to 'Thisai Ayirathu Ainnuruvar of Jayangonda Chola Mandalam'. It is most likely that this Eriviran accompanied the merchants from Jayakonda Chola Mandalam from other parts of the country. The Hero would be killed in an encounter with waylaid thieves. By this discovery of this rare herostone it is concluded that the present Highways to Hogenakkal was in vogue since 14th century, connecting Tamil country with Karnataka.

Merchant Ruler

In an inscription at Naduppatti, of Uthangarai taluk records that, in the 19th regnal year of Mahendrarvarman (CE 609) Kinangan, a Vanigar (merchant) ruled Kippaiyur (referred as 'uraalum, means to ruler or administrator). He died in 'Ur Azhivu' battle; a herostone was erected for his courageous act⁴. Generally the battle of UrAzhivu was related with cattle rides.

Merchant Warrior Servant

In an eighth century CE herostone inscription at Kanappanur of Harur taluk, Dharmapuri district records the 47th regnal year of Shivamaran, the Ganga-Kongani king, mentions "Vanigachadaiyanar, a servant of Thezhniyar, son of Kandavanathirayar, the ruler of Puramalai Nadu (one of the ancient divisions of Thagadur Nadu), was died in a battle at Kudal"⁵. The warrior was riding on an elephant. Based on this description the warrior should be a member of "Athikoshathar" i.e., "elephant brigade" of merchant troops⁶.

The Reddiyar of Uthangari Taluk in present

3 *Dhinamani* (Tamil Daily), July, 1995

4 Nagasamy, R., *op.cit.*, p.82.

5 *Ibid.*, p.7.

6 Poongundran, R., *Athikoshaththar, essay in "Tholiyal Karauththarangu"*, Tholporul Aaivuththurai Veliedu, Chennai, 1983, p. 80.

Krishnagiri district, inscription belongs to 8th century on paleographical ground describes about an Ambalam established by the Valanjiyar Ainnutruvar (trade guild)⁷. Ambalam means a mandapa in temple or an open building for public concourse; or temple. It reveals that the Valanjiyar –Ainnutruvar guild was established in Reddiyur around 8th century⁸.

Construction of Jain Temple

During the reign of Nulamba Mahendra, two merchants named Nitiyannan and Sandiyannan had established a Jain Basthi, Jaina Temple in Dharmapuri town. The inscription records about their endowments and about the function of ‘Nagaram’ organization⁹.

Nibanthas by Merchants

Settlements of numerous traders were found in Hosur around 13th - 14th centuries. The Mylapore guild was one amongst them. It had made many charity works throughout Tamil Nadu¹⁰. A broken piece inscription at Chandrasudeshwarar temple, Hosur records about an endowment made by Thiruvallamudaiyan on the member of this guild¹¹. Another trader named, Thirumadappillai son of Kodunsentru Marunthandai was a member of this Mylapore guild, made a nipantha to lid sandi lamp in Chandrasudeshwarar temple, Hosur¹².

Endowments by Business Community

The inscriptions of Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri districts show various kinds of endowments. The Penneshwaramadam inscription of 29th regnal year of Kulothunga III (CE 1207), The Muthaiyur Businessman, named Perayiramudaiyan donated land to lid nandalamp (perpetual lamp)

at Penneshwaramadam temple¹³. The Sivadi (Dharmapuri district) inscription belong to 11th regnal year of Rajarajan III (CE 1227) records a land donation made by Kandamuzhan Jayankondan Thiruvannamalaiyudaiyan Paramandaleshwara Jayabalan, who had established a talam or centre to the Thiruchenganeshwarar temple in Dharmapuri¹⁴. This talam or the centre was considered to be a ‘adikeeltalam’ where guild’s military units stayed¹⁵.

The Thirtham (Krishnagiri district) inscription inscribed in CE 1275, with no name of the ruler, records a donation of one pon by Perunchenpakkamudaiyan of Poovaniyam to lid a santi lamp in Thirtham temple¹⁶. The Poovaniyam mentioned here might be Bhavai of Kongu country. It was appropriate to consider that, this business man while travelling to Kolar from Poovaniyan via Thirtham made this endowment¹⁷. In CE 1417, a business man had made donation to the same temple for the benefit of Annadana Udaiyar¹⁸.

Devar Kundai, once the capital of Hoysolas, Ramanathan fractions, found a temple in the name Kundeshwarar. In the pillars of the mandapa name of business men were inscribed. This mandapa might be established by business men, hence their names were inscribed in the pillars. Two such names were oblivious. They were: Vaanigan Saththanth Thailanthalvan and Vaanigan Saththanth Kotrirathazhvan¹⁹.

Establishment of Pattanams and Erivirapattanams

The place name Pattanam denoted to the place where business flourished. The inscriptions of Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri mentions many names of such pattanams; like, Desi pattanam, Surapattinam, Nanadesipattanam, Desi Yuiyakonda Chola Pattanam, Vira Vellala Pattanam and etc.

Now-a day’s Sindalpadi in Dharmapuri district was mentioned as Singappadi was known as Desipattanam around 12-13th centuries. The name

7 Nagasamy, R., *op.cit.*, p. 99.

8 Santhalingam, C., *Varalatril Thagadur*, Puduzhuthu Pathipagam, Kaverippattinam, 2005, p. 159.

9 *Epigraphia Indica, Vol. X*, pp.65-67 & *ARE* No.304 / 1901.

10 Nilakandasatry, K.A., *The Cholas*, University of Madras, 1955 ed., p. 595.

11 Nagasamy, R., *op.cit.*, p. 134.

12 *Ibid.*, *op.cit.*, p. 112.

13 *Ibid.*, *Vol- II*, p. 54.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

15 Santhalingam, C., *op.cit.*, p. 161.

16 Nagasamy, R., *op.cit.*, Vol-II, p.24.

17 Santhalingam, C., *op.cit.*, p. 162.

18 Nagasamy, R., *op.cit.*, Vol-II, p.25.

19 Sanlaingam, C., *op.cit.*, p. 162.

itself illustrates that the Nadadesi guild was firmly established here. One trader had made donations to the Sindagappadi temple god in the 13th regnal year of Kulothunga III (CE. 1191)²⁰. The Harur (Dharmapuri district) inscription paleographically dated 13th century, mentions presence of a trader named Iyappa Devan²¹. The 20th regnal year (CE 1198) inscription of Kulothunga Chollan III of Maniyampadi, records about a ‘Surapattam’²². It records about an endowment of land and 98 kalam (grains or such kind) made by Seiyaperumal to those from his village Idangai Masevanallurana Sathappadi Kuppaiur join to done bravery to Kulothunga Chola Nadu. According to C. Santhalingam the warriors received this endowment might be belong to military guilds²³. In 13th 14th centuries the Kadagaththur near Dharmapuri became one of the important business centres. In CE 1253 it was known as Nanadesipattanam²⁴. In CE 1430, during the rule of Pirathapa Devarayar the same place name was changed to Desiyuyiakonda Chola Patnam²⁵. The Nanadesi was the name of a powerful guild with certain independent. They had done with business with all countries²⁶. The presence of this group in Kadagaththur shows its business wealth of Thagadur region. One Vira Vallalapattinam was established in Hosur (Krishnagiri district) region in 16th century.

Another important inscription related to the guilds activities in Thagadur Nadu was found in Koththur in Krishnagiri district. It was situated on trade route to Mysore. The inscription bears the name Vira Vallala of Hoysola dynasty. The date was wrongly carved as Saga 1433 corresponding to CE 1511; the saga 1243 age was more probable²⁷. During the reign of Vira Vallala for his benefit, Ramannan son of Angappa Nayakkar, combined to two villages, the Athiyur and Thenulanpallam and renamed it as Vira Vallala Pattinam and gifted it

to few persons²⁸. In the inscription Nadu, Nagaram, and Nangithesai Pathinervisaiyaththar were mentions to carry out the said gift. Adikeelthalthu Ainnutruvar, Aththisayar names were also found in it. The Nadu was the administrative organization of agrarians and the Nagaram was the administrative organization of business men. The Nanguthesai Pathinervisaiyaththar denotes certain kind of guild. Adikeelthalam denoted where the guild warrior stayed. Generally these Adikeelthalam were established on the trade routes to protect the interest of guilds and caravan. The word Athisayar may be a corruption of Athikoshaththar. They were elephant troops of guild’s military. Hence in 14th century, this place should be a strong guild centres along with its military unites such as Adikeelthalam and Athikosham.

Other Services

The Sivan temple situated at Kambainallur itself was known as Desinathar temple. Hence it might be established by guild. In one of inscriptions in the temple records inscribed in 15th century during the rule of Immadi Bhukkarayar records about a business man belong to Nanadesi guild. He was highly influential as making signatures in government’s documents²⁹. Little earlier a short note was made on Kadagathur situated near Dharmapuri and its business significance. In the sandai held here, the levies such as ‘Thavavarigai’, ‘Magamai Adikasu’, ‘Allayam’ were collected. In the inscription the word ‘Kadai’ mean shop was also mentioned. It reveals that, during this period there were many small traders established their business shops³⁰.

Conclusion

Though Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri districts geographically defined as dry and socially and economically backward area most suited for pastoral life and economy; which gave less opportunity for mercantile activities. But the inscriptional evidences of these two districts reveal that the mercantile guilds activities were found as early from 6th century CE. However, between 10th to 15th centuries the

20 Nagasamy, R., *op.cit.*, Vol-I, p. 36.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

23 Santhalingam, C., *op.cit.*, p. 161.

24 Nagasamy, R., *op.cit.*, Part-II, p. 124.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 101.

26 Sastri, K.A.N, *op.cit.*, p. 597.

27 Santhalingam, C., *op.cit.*, p. 161.

28 Nagasamy, R., *op.cit.*, Vol-I, p.140.

29 *Ibid.*, Part-I, p. 11.

30 *Ibid.*, Part-II, p. 100.

activities of these guilds flourished in Dharmapuri, Hosur, Kadagaththur, Harur, Kambainallur, Sinthalpadi. Their activities include the socio-religious functions, religious functions, military functions, tax collections and secular purposes. Some traders were involved in the Ur or village administrators

and rulers. Few worriers were involved in other than the duty of protecting the interests of guilds like herd retrieval and participating in wars for king or local heads. The secular purpose includes the endowments to temple, religious functions and establishment of temples or mandapas.