

# Polur Fort

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### Abstract

An 800-year-old grand fort built by Tamils in Tamil land is located at Polur, Tiruvannamalai district. It is known that this fort was built by the Sambuvaraya kings. From the 11th century AD to the 14th century AD, the Sambuvarayas accepted the rule of the later Chola, Pandya and Vijayanagara emperors and were the rulers of Tondaimandalam and were small land kings. Virinchipuram and Kanchipuram near Vellore were the capitals of Sambuvarayas. Padaiveedu near Polur was a fort town of the Sambuvarayas.<sup>1</sup>

### Sambuvaraya

Sambuvaraya can be divided into Sambu + Araiya. Sambu means Shiva and Araiya means leader or officer. The Sambuvarayas worshiped Lord Shiva as the primary deity. Sambuvarayas are those who serve Lord Shiva.<sup>2</sup> They used the bull, the vehicle of Shiva, as their state symbol and flag. They have also issued coins with the image of a bull.<sup>3</sup> The title Araiya was given during the Chola period.<sup>4</sup> The posts were given as Araiya, Maraya, Peraraiya, Mutharaiya. It is also said that the Sambuvarayas are the descendants of sage Sambu.<sup>5</sup>

### Origin of the Sambuvarayas

The first known Sengeni Sathan Nalayiravan alias Sambuvaraya and Sengeni Sathan Ammaiappan alias Rajendra Chola Sambuvaraya hailed from Munnoor near Tindivanam in Villupuram district.<sup>6</sup> Later they gained political influence and gained fame in Tondaimandalam. Sengeni is the family name of Sambuvarayas.<sup>7</sup>

- 1 Krishnaswami Aiyangar, S. *South India and her Muhammadan Invaders*, 1921.
- 2 Sethuraman, N. "The Sambuvarayas of 14th Century." *JESI*, vol. XIII, 1986, P. 12. Thangavelu, K., and Ila Thiyagarajan. *Sambuvarayar Varalaru*, 1990, P. 6.
- 3 *Sambuvarayar Varalaru*, P. 108. Seetharaman, Arumuga. *Sambuvarayar Kasugal* - Cover image. Kalvettu (inscription) - 23, 1989, Cover image.
- 4 Kalvettu - 23, P. 27.
- 5 Kalvettu - 23, P. 1.
- 6 Sadasiva Pandarathar, T. V. *Pirkala Chozhar Sarithiram*, 2008, P. 88. *Sambuvarayar Varalaru*, P. 9.
- 7 *South India and her Muhammadan Invaders*, P. 15. Nilakanta Sastri, K. A. *The Cholas*, Vol. II (part-I), P. 71, 158. Rajamanukkanar, M. *Chozhar Varalaru*, 2005, P. 316.

## Rule Border

Thiruvannamalai, Polur, Vandavasi, Vellore, Arani, Cheyyar, Aarkadu, Gudiyatham, Arakkonam, Walajapet, Ponneri, Thiruvallur, Saidapet, Chennai, Thirupperumbudur, Kanchipuram, Chengalpattu, Uthiramerur, Madhuranthakam, Cheyyur, Gingee, Tindivanam, Villupuram, Thirukovilur, Panruti. The northern part of Tamil Nadu, which includes the regions, was the Tondaimandalam, the domain of the Sambuvarayas.<sup>8</sup>

## Sambuvarayas Kings

### Rajagambira Sambuvaraya 1236 - 1268

During the twentieth reign of Rajaraja Chola III, Athimallan Sambukula Peruman alias Rajagambira Sambuvaraya came to power in 1236 AD.<sup>9</sup> He was the first Sambuvaraya to establish independent rule in AD 1258. He built a fort at Padaiveedu north of Polur and made it his capital. He named it Marudarisar Padaiveedu. In the middle of this fort, in 1258, he built a Shiva temple called Ammaiappan Ishwaramudaiyar.<sup>10</sup> His reign was known as the Rajagambira Kingdom and the Padaiveedu Kingdom and the hill there was known as the Rajagambira Hill.<sup>11</sup> The fort built on this hill is Polur Fort.

In 1267 AD, the Telugu Chola king Vijayakanda Gopala captured the Padaiveedu kingdom. After the death of Rajagambira Sambuvaraya in AD 1268, the Sambuvarayas remained petty kings under Vijayakanda Gopala and then the Pandyas.<sup>12</sup>

### Veerasamba 1306 - 1322

Malik Kafur invaded Tamil Nadu in AD 1311-1312 when there was a fierce succession contest between Sundarapandia and Veerapandia in the Pandya country. During the political chaos prevailing at that time, the Sambuvarayas re-established independent rule in Padaiveedu in Thondaimandalam.<sup>13</sup> At that time, Kulasekara Sambuvaraya and his son Veerasampa, who

received the titles of 'Conqueror of Cheyyar'<sup>14</sup> and 'Conqueror of Anthalil',<sup>15</sup> came to power. Veerasampa was the first Sambuvaraya king to issue a coin named 'Veerasampa Kulikai'.<sup>16</sup> The Thiruvallam temple inscription mentions Veerasampa's excellence as a great warrior (Nidravasana Vijayi), 'one who defeats enemies and accumulates victories within the time of sleep'.<sup>17</sup>

### Venru Mankonda Sambuvaraya 1322 - 1340

He came to power after Veerasampa.<sup>18</sup> The Kuttiam inscription mentions that his original name was Ekambaranathan.<sup>19</sup> He also has the title of 'Going the way he won'. It is said that he got the special name of Venru Mankonda Sambuvaraya after he saved the country from the Muslims, Pandyas and Hoysalas and recovered the Thondaimandalam from Muppidi Nayaka, a Kakatiyas general.<sup>20</sup>

### Raja Narayana Sambuvaraya I 1337 - 1363

### Raja Narayana Sambuvaraya II 1338 - 1363

### Raja Narayana Sambuvaraya III 1356 - 1379

After Venru Mankonda Sambuvaraya, the three have ruled under the name of Rajanarayanan with the epithet of 'Sakala Loka Chakravarthy'.

Thirumallinathan alias Rajanarayana Sambuvaraya I, the eldest son of Venru Mankonda Sambuvaraya, won among them and came to power in AD 1337.<sup>21</sup> His younger son Rajanarayana Sambuvarayan II alias Ponnin Thambiran came to power in 1338 AD.<sup>22</sup> He is known as Venru Mankonda Sambuvaraya II.<sup>23</sup> Rajanarayana Sambuvarayan III alias Tirumallinathan Thirunetruchamban came to power in 1356 AD. He is the Grandson of Venru Mankonda Sambuvaraya.<sup>24</sup>

14 *The Sambuvarayas of 14th Century*, P. 13, 15.

15 *South India and her Muhammadan Invaders*, P. 60.

16 *Sambuvarayar Naaigal*, P. 12.

*Sambuvarayar Varalaru*, P. 30.

*Sambuvaraiyar*, P. 53.

17 *Sambuvarayar Varalaru*, P. 26.

18 *South India and her Muhammadan Invaders*, P. 61.

19 Kalvetu - 24, P. 21, 22.

20 *Sambuvarayar Varalaru*, P. 46.

*Sambuvaraiyar*, P. 57.

21 *The Sambuvarayas of 14th Century*, P. 17.

22 Ibid.

23 *Sambuvaraiyar*, P. 69.

24 *The Sambuvarayas of 14th Century*, P. 18, 19.

8 *Sambuvarayar Varalaru*, P. 108.

9 Sathiyamoorthi, A. M. *Sadasiva Pandarathar Katturaigal*, 1998, P. 45.

10 *Sambuvarayar Varalaru*, P. 20.

11 *Sadasiva Pandarathar Katturaigal*, P. 45.

12 *Sambuvarayar Varalaru*, P. 259.

13 *South India and her Muhammadan Invaders*, pp. 58-60 Thirumavalavan, K. *Sambuvaraiyar*, 1989, P. 49.

## Kumara Kampana's Invasions

Kumara Kampana's invasion of Tamil Nadu is mentioned in Madhura Vijayam by his wife Ganga Devi. Vijayanagara king Kumara Kampana, who was ruling with Mulbagal as his capital, his son Savanna, generals Saluva Mangu, Gandarkooli Marayanayaka, Gopanna and Saluva Narasimha attacked the Sambuvarayas.<sup>25</sup> Thiruvannamalai region was captured by Kumara Kampana and Chengalpattu region by Savanna. But this first attempt was defeated by the Sambuvarayas.<sup>26</sup> But Savanna did not back down from trying to defeat the Sambuvarayas.

Again in 1359 AD, Kampana's army captured Aaur via Krishnagiri, Uthangarai, Singarapettai, Chennai, Thiruvannamalai and also captured Thirukovilur. Walajapet (1360 AD), Madurantakam (1361 AD), Gudiyatham, Villupuram and Gingee (1362 AD) were also captured.<sup>27</sup>

## Siege of Polur Fort 1362

The Vijayanagara force, which continued to advance, encountered Sambuvaraya's force at Virinchipuram near Vellore. Sambuvaraya, who escaped from there, hid in the hill fort of Rajagambira in Polur.<sup>28</sup> Kampana's army laid siege to the hill fort of Rajagambira. The Tamil army was defeated in a fierce battle there. The hill fort of Rajagambira was destroyed.<sup>29</sup> Sambuvaraya was killed in a battle between Sambuvaraya and Kampana who came out of the fort with a sword.<sup>30</sup> The victorious Kumara Kampana ruled from Kanchipuram, incorporating Thondaimandalam into one of the Mandals of the Vijayanagara Empire.<sup>31</sup>

A Madam inscription near Vandavasi dated 1362 AD mentions the battle of Rajagambira hill fort.<sup>32</sup> Vijayanagara commander Gandarkooli Marayanayaka captured and defeated the glorious Rajagambira hill fort called 'Azhiya Aran' and destroyed Venru Mankonda Sambuvaraya and got the special title of 'Azhiya Aran Azhitha'. He erected a tower as a symbol of his victory and named it 'Gandarkooli Marayanayak Thirugopuram'.<sup>33</sup>

## Who was Killed by Kambana?

The name of Sambuvaraya, who died a heroic death carrying a sword, is not mentioned in Madhura Vijayam And the Madam inscription mentions only Mankondan. Since the Madam inscription was written in 1362 AD, it can be said with certainty that the person killed by Kumara Kampana was Raja Narayana Sambuvaraya II alias Ponnin Thambiran known as Venru Mankonda Sambuvaraya II.

And Kampana handed over the power to the Raja Narayana Sambuvaraya I, who had surrendered to him and allowed him to rule. He handed over the reign to his son Raja Narayana Sambuvaraya III. Kampana also maintained matrimonial relations with the Sambuvarayas.<sup>34</sup> The Aaur inscription mentions Kampana as the brother-in-law of Raja Narayana III<sup>35</sup>. Kampana and Raj Narayana III jointly held a federation in Thontaimandalam. Kampana's son Sammana,<sup>36</sup> followed by Hariyara and Veeravirupana, continued the federation. With the year 1379 AD, the reign of Raja Narayana Sambuvaraya III and the rule of the Sambuvarayas comes to an end.<sup>37</sup>

## Polur Fort

The historic Rajagambira hill fort, famous as the "Azhiya Aran Konda" (immortal walled) of the Sambuvarayas, is located on the Javadi mountain range near Polur. Situated on the top of a hill at an

25 Krishnaswami Ayyangar, S. *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 1919, P. 2.

26 Thiruvenkatachari. S. *Maduravijayam of Ganga Devi*, Part I, 1957, pp. 25-34.

*Annual Report on South-Indian Epigraphy*, 1928.

27 *Sambuvarayar Varalaru*, pp. 74-76.

28 *Maduravijayam of Ganga Devi*, Part II, 1957, Sloka: 47-50, P. 31, 32.

29 *Maduravijayam of Ganga Devi*, Sloka: 51-66, P. 32, 34.

30 *Maduravijayam of Ganga Devi*, Sloka: 67-83, pp. 34-36.

31 Harihara Sastri, G., and V. Srinivasa Sastri. *Madura Vijaya or Virakamparaya Charita*, 1924, P. 4, 5.

32 Kalvettu - 24, P. 26

33 *Maduravijayam of Ganga Devi*, P. 64. *Sambuvaraiyar*, pp. 82-84.

34 *The Sambuvarayas of 14th Century*, P. 22. *Maduravijayam of Ganga Devi*, P. 32.

*Sambuvarayar Varalaru*, P. 83.

35 *Sambuvarayar Varalaru*, P. 81, 82.

36 Krishnaswamy, A. *The Tamil Country under Vijayanagar*, 1964, P. 66.

37 *Sambuvarayar Varalaru*, pp. 85-86.

altitude of about 3000 feet, the fort has a 10-foot-wide perimeter wall that stretches for about 10 to 15 kilometers. Stairs are built along the perimeter wall for walking. The 15 feet high grand entrance gate and the entrance hall are very well designed. On the pillars of the gate and on the pillars of the hall and on the roofs, there are sculptures of gods, mythological stories and other beautiful sculptures. Another side of the fort is the back gate with a tunnel. Black stone houses, granary, watchtower, pond, dilapidated temple, collapsed house walls, more than fifteen urals are also found in the fort. A 8 feet wide footpath has been constructed from the bottom to reach the fort through the hill. Now this road is completely collapsing and covered with bushes. From Rajagambira Sambuvaraya, who established the independent regime, to Raja Narayana Sambuvaraya III, the Sambuvaraya rule lasted for more than a hundred years, and the construction of the fort continued during the time of each Sambuvaraya. As the pillar design of the entrance hall is in Pandya style and the pillars are engraved with fish sculptures of Pandyas and goddess Meenakshi with a parrot,<sup>38</sup> it can be said with certainty that most of the fort was built in the 13th and 14th century AD when the Sambuvarayas were the rulers of the Pandya Empire.

### Hall and Sculptures

The semicircular hall is divided into two parts, ground floor and upper floor. 12 pillars support the hall. The pillars and walls are carved with beautiful sculptures like Shiva Lingam, Nandi, Goddess Draupadi, Goddess Meenakshi, Hanuman, Moon Devouring Snake, Rahu Ketu Snake, Tortoise, the kurma avatar of Krishna, Peacock, Fish, Conch, Drishti figure, Lotus flowers, Agni Kalasam.

### Conclusion

The historic 800-year-old Polur Rajagambira Hill Fort is one of the foremost forts in Tamil Nadu. This fort is a historical landmark bearing the history of 38 Panchanagam Pillai, R. Madurai Sri. Meenakshi Sundareshwarar Koil Varalaru, Cover image, 1959.

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Thondaimandalam. The fact that the fort remained unknown for so many years may be due to its inaccessible location. If the pride of Thiruvannamalai is the Annamalaiyar Temple, another pride is the Polur Fort. Further research in this fort will provide more rare information.

