

The Types of Guild Inscription (Special Reference To The Dharmapuri District)

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Abstract

The earliest evidence on memorial stones found in Sangam literature. The Sangam literatures like the Tolkappiyam, Agananuru, Purananuru, malaipadukadam, Pattinapalai, etc. speak on memorial stone in a detailed manner. A close study of the megalithic monuments with the help of Sangam literature reveals that the custom of megalithic monuments developed in to hero stone cult or virakals around Dharmapuri District. Hero stone inscriptions are important source-s for the history of Dharmapuri district. There are many beautiful hero stones in Dharmapuri District which depict war scenes with soldiers riding on horses and elephants. Some of them also have a fort wall etched in them. The most notable hero stones Tamil Nadu are housed in the State Department museum at Dharmapur

Key Words : *memorial stone, sangam, guild, serni, naigama.*

The erection of memorials to the dead is an ancient custom and found all over the world. These memorials took different forms in different countries and times. In Tamil Nadu the custom of erecting memorials first introduced in the megalithic period. Even though there is no written document to assess this custom. But in Sangam literature it is clearly mentioned. From fifth century BC onwards the aim of constructing the sepulchral monuments developed in to hero stone cult. The practice of hero stone cult is noticed in the literature and more in the hero stone inscriptions. It helps to study the contemporary society, political history, the development of the script, language and evolution of iconography of the hero stone figures.

A guild is an association of artisans or merchants who control the practice of their craft in a particular town. The earliest types of guild were formed as group of tradesmen.

They were organized in a manner something between a professional association, trade union, and a secret society. There were several types of guilds, including the two main categories of merchant guilds and craft guilds.

Sreni and Naigama

There are several terms, frequently occur in the Vedic literature Sreni, and Naigama, which denoted co-operative organization in ancient India. The term 'Sreni' was an association of those who took the occupation of trade. It seems that the term was used in the literatures as 'a form of industrial and mercantile organization' in the typical sense of a guild of artisans and craftsmen. The term 'Sreni' was also used frequently in the literature and inscriptions. The term 'Sreni' had been defined as the group of people engaged in co-operative trading or belonging to the same or different castes. Besides, the term 'Naigama' occurs frequently in literature, epigraphs, coins, seals and sealing.

From the contemporary literature and inscriptions we came to know that the trade and commerce was well organized in those days. This guild of ancient India can be compared with the guilds of the medieval Europe. From 'Jataka' stories there were eighteen such guilds during and after the 6th century A.D. But the number was much more as mentioned in other contemporary literatures. In fact, there were guilds for all types of commercial activities, big or small.

Guilds

Besides serving the purpose of keeping the members of a trade together like a close community, the Guilds undertook many useful roles such as administrative, economic, charitable and banking functions. The guilds had a good deal of administrative control over their members. The trained workers of the guilds provided a congenial atmosphere for work. They procured raw materials for manufacturing, controlled quality of manufactured goods and their price, and located markets for their sale. This shows that guilds loaned money to artisans and merchants as well. Guilds established their efficiency and integrity and epigraphic evidence shows that not only the public, even the royalty

deposited money with them. However, the guilds had limited scope in banking in comparison to modern banks.

The co-operative guilds were quite large institutions where the workers and traders enjoyed all sorts of benefits. They could save the extra expenditure and also were relieved from the uneven competition with the guilds. The organization of the guilds was also helpful for the government as the latter could easily extract the revenue and the industries could work smoothly. Moreover, as the professions became hereditary, the guilds also became rigidly organized. Besides serving the purpose of keeping the members of a trade together like a close community, the guilds undertook many useful roles such as administrative, economic, charitable and banking functions. The powerful Guilds performed judicial functions as well. The guilds had a good deal of administrative control over their members.

Vaisyas

The root of Indian guilds to some extent lay under the ancient Varna system, which is based on the functional division of the society. The Brahmanas engaged in learning and teaching and performing religious rites. The Kshatriyas are the warriors and ruling society. The work of the Vaisyas are agriculture, Cattle rearing and trade & commerce. But in course of time, the formation of three separate occupational groups were divided into many sub-groups. The function of the sudras in the traditional Varna system was to serve the three higher classes. Since the performing of menial tasks as also work involving manual labour came to be shunned by the higher Varnas, the manual arts and crafts also were left to the Sudras. Besides, a number of non-Aryan tribes come to be naturalized within the Varnas system by being placed mostly in the sudra class. They formed their own occupational groups.

Thus arose various occupational groups of the Vaisyas and the Sudras, which were engaged in the processes of production, distribution and exchange. The Vaisyas and the Sudras were dominated and even exploited by the higher varnas and they were subjected to social and legal discrimination. Under such circumstances the Vaisyas and

the Sudras engaged in various professions would have realized the advantage of forming guilds for safeguarding their interests.

People residing in a particular area and following the same occupation naturally cooperated with one another to achieve common objectives. So, generally, the crafts were localized which helped in creating better understanding amongst craftsmen residing in the same area. Besides, the hereditary profession had the advantage that a child could easily learn from his father and other elder of the family. The experience of the previous generation thus came to be utilized, and this also made sizeable number of trained craftsmen available to different guilds. Thus localization of crafts and hereditary nature of professions were also helpful to the craftsmen in keeping their safety.

Nature of the Trade inscriptions

Trade played a significant role in the life of Sangam age Tamils. There are some stray occurrences of regional trade guilds like *Vellarai Nigamaththor* in the Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions. From 9th century onwards, such trade guilds started functioning in a somewhat autonomous or distinct manner. They convened their meetings, took decisions, engraved them in separate inscriptions and installed such inscribed slabs in public places. *Ayyapozhil Ainnurruvar* (The five hundred of Aihole), *Tisaiyirathu Ainnurruvar* (The five hundred of the thousand directions), *Nanadesi* (those of various countries), *Valanjiyar* (Balijas or Banajigas), *Pathinenvishayaththar*, and *Manigramathar* are some of the trade guilds that functioned in such a manner.¹ *Chitramezhipperiya nattar*, another guild, but of the agriculturists, started functioning from 11th century onwards. It had its own conventions and functions, and its functions were at times complementary to, and at usually in combination with, those of the trade guilds. These guilds had their own militia, and other paraphernalia. They had their prasastis (or *meykkeerththis*) in both Sanskrit and Tamil. It was customary to carve the figures of the trident, money purse, conch, plough, anvil stone, sword, elephant, horse, mule, and the deity *Ayyapozhil Parameswari or Badra Kali*, along with the inscription.

Ainnurruvar

The Ainnurruvar were the most important mercantile communities in South India. More than eighty inscriptions were collected in Tamil nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. These inscriptions were engraved between the eighth and seventeenth century. The Ainnurruvar, Nanadesi, Valanjiyar and the Nagarattar were found in the majority of inscriptions in South India. The earliest inscription of the Ainnurruvar was collected in Aihole which is in Karnataka.

The name of this community has been the subject of various interpretations by different scholars. In most of the inscriptions it appears as the Five Hundred Svamins of Ayyavale. Several variants of the name occur in the Tamil epigraphs, such as Naanaateci-thicai-Aayiraththu Ainjujutturar, that is, the Five Hundred of the thousand directions of the Five quarters. The Ayyavole-500 guild became a big over reaching guild of Southern India and most of the existing indigenous and local trade guilds became associated with it. The Manigramam, nagarathar and nanadesi guilds joined with the Ayyavole-500. The Ayyavole guild emerged as a maritime power and continued to flourish in the Kingdom of Srivijaya. This is well documented in an inscription of the Ayyavole guild of the year 1088 AD found in Barus of West Sumatra, Indonesia. South Indian merchants were also active in Burma and the Thai peninsula.

The maximum number of Ainnurruvar inscriptions have occurred during the Chola dynasty that lasted between the 10th and 13th centuries. Most importantly the 1088 inscription of Sumatra (reign of Kulothunga I) and the 1036 A.D.(Rajendra I) inscription in Sri Lanka establish the close association between the Ainnurruvar community and the Cholas beyond doubt. According to Prof.Champakalakshmi, the Ainnurruvar moved in wherever the Cholas had conquered.

Dharmapuri District

Seven guild inscriptions were collected in Dharmapuri district. The names of the places are Kadagattur, Kottaibhairahalli, Poochetti patti, Mallasamudram, Vellichchanthai, Padihagraharam and Sindalpadi. Kadagattur inscription alone inscribed in the Siva temple but other inscriptions are engraved in the stone slabs.

Kadagattur guild inscriptions are engraved in the adhishtana of the Cholisvara Temple which is constructed near the village. A tax called Tari-irai was collected from the Nagarattar of the village. Tari-irai means a tax for the wavers community. It records the tax of the income derived through the tari-irai from the Tirumadai-vilagam of the temple of the god Mudikonda cholisvara mudaiya-nayanar. It is also collected to conduct the Tiruveluchchi and Tiruchandu and also to take the deity to the citadel of the nagarattar of the village.

Two highway inscriptions were recovered in Dharmapuri district. They are erected in a single highway called Athiyaman Peruvali i.e. Athiyaman Highway. A highway between Thagadur and Navar thavalam was found in the 13th century and it was named after the Athiyaman king. One among the two inscriptions is now exhibited in the Archaeological site museum at Dharmapuri and another one is in the field near Chettaikulam.

In Dharmapuri district most of the trade inscriptions collected are engraved in two portions. Symbol like axe, plough, lamp, mother goddess, horse etc. are carved in upper portion of the inscriptions. Inscriptions are engraved in the lower portions. Most of the inscriptions are found in the stone slabs. So inscriptions are in damaged condition. Among the seven inscriptions four inscriptions are engraved in the Chola king Kulothunga III period. Most of the inscriptions are not in good condition. They are unable to read them but only few words are collection.

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