

Cultural Heritage Of Periyakulam - A Study

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Abstract

Periyakulam is a town and a municipality situated on the Varaha River bank in Theni district, Tamilnadu, India. It lies down 13 km beneath the foothills of Western Ghats (i.e., lower portion of the Kodaikanal hills). The place was also sanctified by Arunagirinathar in his Thiruppugal. Periyakulam is called by various names such as *alankulam*, *Desi Erivirapattanam*, *Periyakulam*, *Kulandaimaanagar* or *Kuladaiyur*, and *Mango City*. The village was infested with archaeological vestiges, inscriptions and ancient temples which brought to lime light the cultural heritage of this site.

Introduction

Periyakulam is a town and a municipality situated on the Varaha River bank in Theni district, Tamilnadu, India. The northern bank of Varaha River is called as Vadakarai and southern portion is called as Thenkarai. The town is very fertile as it lies down 13 km beneath the foothills of Western Ghats (i.e., lower portion of the Kodaikanal hills).¹ It is spread over an area of 21 kms and surrounded by the villages Kailasapatti, T.Kallipatti, Tamaraikulam, Vadugapatti, Melmangalam and Jeyamangalam. There are direct bus services. The village was infested with archaeological vestiges, inscriptions and ancient temples. The place was also sanctified by Arunagirinathar in his Thiruppugal. Thus the cultural heritage of this site is brought to lime light.

Toponymy

Periyakulam was embellished with various names such as

- *Aalankulam*²
- *Desi Erivirapattanam*³
- *Periyakulam*⁴
- *Kulandaimaanagar* and *Kuladaiyur*⁵
- *Mango City*

The Later Pandya inscriptions in Rajendracholesvara Temple and Kailasanatha temple revealed the village name as '*Mel Nedunkula nattu Aalankulam (nana) Desi Erivirapattanam*'. Aalankulam was the ancient name of Periyakulam. The lithic records of Maravarman Sundara Pandya Deva dated in his 15th regnal year (1230 A.D.)⁶ and 19th regnal Year (1234- 35 A.D.)⁷ and the lithic record of Maravarman Kulasekaradeva –I dated in 26th regnal Year (1293- 94 A.D.)⁸ refers to the place name as 'Aalankulam'

The name *Aalankulam* was named after the temperament of water bodies. Generally the common aspect such as lake, tank and pond refer to the prosthetic water bodies.⁹ In Tamil the word has been split into Aal + Am+ Kulam .

Aal means water

Aal+Am = Aalam, represents the depth of the water body

Kulam means pond.

Again it was split into Aalam + Kulam , which means beautiful pond filled with plentiful water.

The name '*Desi Erivirapattanam*', had its meaning by divide the word into desi+ Pattanam., whereas Desi is the term Nanadesi which means a big trading community comprising of several trading groups.¹⁰ Nanadesis were a powerful autonomous corporation of Merchants. They visited all countries in course of their trade and they enjoyed the respected position especially in Chola Kingdom. They had their own army for the protection of the ware houses and transit. They also concerned themselves in the local administration where they have settled.¹¹

Erivirapattanam is the town of the Eriviras. *Their common activities included being guardians or protector of grants and declaring some towns as Erivirapattanam.*¹² *Virapattanas or Erivirapattanam* was the market towns, which were protected by mercenary troops attached to big trading guilds like Nanadesis such centers came up along major trade routes connecting different parts of South India and their emergence in Tamil Nadu may be dated back to the 10th C.A.D. or not later than reign of Rajendra I.¹³ Hall interprets '*Erivira*' as "Heroes of the Road" has earlier been translated as mercenary soldier armed with spears" hence associated armed protection.

Cholapuram was the first Nagaram or marketing centre dated from the period of RajendraI after whom it was named. The Chola –Pandya Viceroys had their residential quarters in Rajendra Chola Puram.¹⁴ It is proved that by the name *Mel Nedunkula nattu Alankulamana (nana) Desi Erivirapattanam*' Periyakulam was acted an well flourished mercantile Town. It was also ensures that Periyakulam was under the Chola dominance as the roving trade was endorsed by Cholas and the Temple Rajendracholesvara was named Rajendra Chola it is surmised that Chola –Pandya Viceroys was appointed by Rajendra Chola. Later the name (*nana) Desi Erivirapattanam* was slowly disappeared and the place occur the final name Periyakulam.

At present it is called as Periyakulam. Yet another lithic record of Rajendracholesvara Temple identified the village name as Periyakulam. In Tamil the word Periyakulam is split into *Periya + Kulam* whereas *Periya* means big and *Kulam* means tank thus based on the water resource the village is called as Periyakulam. There is an another view regarding the name Periyakulam is that the village goddess called Periyaal is survived on the bank of Periyakulam pond and the pond is called as Periyaakka Kulam, called after the Goddess name and the place was named as Periyakulam.¹⁵ However the names Aalankulam and Periyakulam are analogously symbolizes that the village is commonly bounded by water resource and exemplified its nature as depth (Aalam) and big (Periya) which are equally similar.

The village was also refers to '*Kulandaimaanagar*' and '*Kuladaiyur*' in respect of Lord Muruga. The Chola King Rajendra ruled this area at that time he went to for hunting to Agamalai forest which is situated western side of the Varaha River and he hunted a wild pig which was feeding milk to its cubs. The young ones are cried. Lord Muruga appeared before the cubs and because of his mercy the cubs got milk from the dead pig. On saw that king erected a temple for Lord Balamurga and creates a city near the temple called '*Kulandaimaanagar*' and '*Kuladaiyur*'. The story was depicted in sculpture in the temple. Periyakulam is also portrayed as 'Mango city' as it had lot of mango grooves.

Arunagirinathar in his Thiruppugal refers to the place as Kulanthamanagar. The song describes the features of Lord Siva who is seated inside the temple of this place called KuLanthai, also known as Periyakulam as follows.

*tharanga vArkuzhal (kuLanthainagar)
tharanga vArkuzhat Ranunuthal vizhiyAlam
thakaintha mAmulaith thudiyidai madamAthar
parantha mAlirut padukuzhi vasamAkip
payanthu kAlanuk kuyirkodu thaviyAmal
varantha rAvidiR piRarevar tharuArE
makizhnthu thOkaiyiR puvivalam varuvOnE
kurumpai mAmulaik kuRamakaL maNavALA
kurumpai mAmulaik kuRamakaL maNavALA
kuLanthai mAnakarath thaLiyuRai perumALE¹⁶*

Artefacts at Periyakulam

The exploration conducted by K.V.Raman, ASI at Periyakulam Taluk yielded Microlithic tools in T.Kallupatti. At T.kallupatti, pot sherds of black and red wares painted in white pigments with variety of designs like horizontal and oblique lines, concentric semi-circles, dots etc., It also yielded black and red ware. Cists were also found at found at Munanandipatti and Urn burials at Chennampatti, Kuraiyur, Krisalkalampatti, Pudur and Kottaipatti villages were all in Periyakulam Taluk.¹⁷ Soil erosion occurred in the rainy season at Periyakulam in New ground yielded beads, coins, pot sherds and urn burials. Images of god and goddess were found in the cultivatable land of Mr.Kaliyappan Chettiyar.¹⁸ The archaeological vestiges assignable to Palaeolithic, Microlithic and Megalithic culture are available in this place in the form material evidence could be traced the history of Periyakulam from Pre historic period.

Inscriptions

About eleven inscriptions are found in this village and published in the Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy (ARE)-1907 and South Indian Inscriptions (SII) - Vol. XXIII. Among these inscriptions, six found in Rajendracholesvara Temple, four found in Kailasanatha temple and one found in slab set up in a field all these inscriptions belonged to Pandya period.

The inscription of Maravarman alias Tribhuvanachakaravartin Kulasekaradeva –I ‘Who pleased to take every country’ dated in his 26th regnal year at Central shrine of west wall in Rajendracholesvara Temple registers an agreement made by the *Muppaduvattattu – Siva Brahmanas* (Priest of Siva temple)of the temple of Rajendracholisvaramudiya Nayanar at Alangulam in *Menedungala nadu* to burn four lamps in different shrines for the amount of forty *panam* received by them from Taran Uyyavandan Kaduvetti of Podiyil puttur in *Sivala Valanadu*.¹⁹

The second inscription found at in the western wall of the central shrine at Rajendracholesvara Temple mentions a certain Immadi Vayiru Nayakkar with the title ‘Maraipukkar– kavalan’ who seems to have been the devote of Senapatidevar and main shrine.²⁰ The 15th Regnal year lithic record of Maravarman alias Tribhuvanachakaravartin Sundara Pandya Deva in south wall of the Subramaniya Shrine mentions Alangulamana desiya and Padinenvishaya- Isvara.²¹ His another lithic record with similar regnal year is fragmentary and also mentions Padinenvishaya- Isvara in *Neduungula nadu*.²² His yet another lithic record dated

in the 19th regnal year found at *ardhamandapa* of Subramaniya Shrine mentions gift of some *devadana* land (tax free land to temple) to god Rajendracholesvara of Desiyariya Erivirapattanam and *Devakanmis* (servants of the temple).²³ His another lithic record cited a *matha* situated in Desiyariya Erivirapattanam.²⁴

Unnamed and undated inscription from Kailasanatha temple on the hill seems to mark a lineal measure of a cubit as decided by Perran Sokkan probably a leader of the Terkil-nilai-Maravar Community.²⁵ Another lithic record of Maravarman alias Tribhuvanachakaravartin Sundarsa Pandya Deva –I dated in his 18th regnal year engraved in west, south and north bases of the Kailasanatha temple registers a gift of 71/2 *ma* of land to the temple of Uyyavanda-Isvaramudaiya-Nayanar on the hills at Velakularamanallur in Mennedungala Nadu by order of the king for a *tirumadaivilagam* (area around the temple),²⁶ so that the taxes *manaiyirai* (house tax), *kudimai* etc., from the houses thereon could be utilized for burning lights in the temple.²⁷ A lithic record engraved on the rock to the west of the same temple records the gift of land to provide for worship in the temple for the merit of the king Sundararaja by his minister named Alagapperumal Sokkanar Anmaiylagiyan alias Duvarapativelan.²⁸ Another lithic record engraved on the same rock seems to refer the similar gift.²⁹

On a slab set up in a field near the same village point out that the *sarvamanya* (land) gift of land by Balaya- Nayakkar to help in the maintenance of *chattram* established by Sasimuka-Minakshi Nayyakar in front of the temple of Minakshi Sundraesvarasvami at Tiruvalavay (Madurai).³⁰ These epigraphs are quite valuable in reconstructing the political history and socio-economic condition that existed in ancient times in Periyakulam.

Temples

There are many temples found in and around Periyakulam. Among them the Rajendra Cholesvaram Udaiya Nayanar temple, Kailasanathar temple, Vaitheeswaran temple and Varadharaja Perumal temple are the most important. Among the four temples Rajendra Cholesvaram Udaiya Nayanar temple is the ancient. The name and architectural features of the temple gleaned that the temple was originally belonged to Rajendra Chola period. At present it is called as Periyakoil or Subramaniya Swamy koil. Another Kailasanathar temple is situated on hillock of kailasapatti. *Yet another* temple is Vaitheeswaran temple located on the hillock. On the way to hillock there is a cave, Lingam is depicted in wall of the rock on the left side of the lingam holds a long stick whereas devotee on the right holds a pot hanging on the shoulder.³¹

Conclusion

The article entitled “*Cultural Heritage of Periyakulam*” reveals the fact that the village is infested with archaeological artifacts. The exploration conducted in Periyakulam traced its history from Pre historic period. The epigraphic evidence bring into lime light that Periyakulam under the Chola dominance was acted a well flourished mercantile Town. Further the epigraphs throw a flood light on the Political, socio and cultural condition of the said region. The Temples and sculptures in Periyakulam flourished the cultural wealth of the area. Rajendracholesvara Temple which named Rajendra Chola could be able to surmise that the place was under the supremacy of Cholas. The name Periyakulam itself represents the fertility of the place of study. Hence, it is revealed that every village in Tamil Nadu is enriched with historical evidences.

End Notes

- ¹ Somalae, *Madurai Mavattam*(in Tamil),1980,p.391
- ² A.R.E., 409 of 1907, SII Vol. XIII, No.409, A.R.E., 411 of 1907,A.R.E., 416 of 1907
- ³ A.R.E., 409 of 1907, SII Vol. XIII, No.409, A.R.E., 413 of 1907 and A.R.E., 414 of 1907
- ⁴ A.R.E., 410 of 1907
- ⁵ *Uncopied inscription mentions kulandai velayutha sanithi and Sri Gopala sundaram*(ed.), Arunagirinathar, **Thirupugal**, Song 953
- ⁶ A.R.E., 411 of 1907
- ⁷ A.R.E., 413,414 of 1907
- ⁸ A.R.E., 409 of 1907
- ⁹ Alavanthan. R, *kalvettil Ur Peyargal*(in Tamil),Madras,1983,p.12
- ¹⁰ Subbarayalu. Y.,*Tamil kalvettu Sollagarathi [Glossory of Tamil Inscriptions]*, Vol. II., Chennai, 2002, p.359
- ¹¹ Nilakanta Sastri,k.A., *The Colas*, University of Madras, 1984,pp.595-597
- ¹² Appadorai,A., *Economic Conditions in South India(1000-1500A.D)*,Vol.I, University of Madras,1990, p. 396,
- ¹³ Champakalakshmi,R., *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization: South India 300BC to AD1300*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996, pp.336,357
- ¹⁴ *S.I.I.*, Vol. XXIII,145
- ¹⁵ Rajagopal, *Thu, Periyakulam Ur Peyar Ayaivu*(in Tamil),Tamil Illakiya Mantram,Periyakulam, 1994, p.20
- ¹⁶ Sri Gopala sundaram(ed.), Arunagirinathar, **Thirupugal**, Song 953
- ¹⁷ Ghosh,A.,(Ed.), *Indian Archaeology- A Review-1960-61*, ASI, New Delhi,1961,p.18,
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- ¹⁸ Sajahan,S,*Nama uru* (in Tamil),p.152s
- ¹⁹ A.R.E.,409 of 1907, *S.I.I.*, Vol. XXIII, 409
- ²⁰ A.R.E.,410 of 1907, *S.I.I.*, Vol. XXIII, 410
- ²¹ A.R.E.,411 of 1907, *S.I.I.*, Vol. XXIII, 411
- ²² A.R.E.,412 of 1907, *S.I.I.*, Vol. XXIII, 412
- ²³ A.R.E.,413 of 1907, *S.I.I.*, Vol. XXIII, 413
- ²⁴ A.R.E.,414 of 1907, *S.I.I.*, Vol. XXIII, 414
- ²⁵ A.R.E.,415 of 1907, *S.I.I.*, Vol. XXIII, 415
- ²⁶ Subbarayalu. Y.,*Tamil kalvettu Sollagarathi[Glossory of Tamil Inscriptions]*, Vol. II., Chennai, 2002, p.309
- ²⁷ A.R.E.,416 of 1907, *S.I.I.*, Vol. XXIII, 416
- ²⁸ A.R.E.,417 of 1907, *S.I.I.*, Vol. XXIII, 417
- ²⁹ A.R.E.,418 of 1907, *S.I.I.*, Vol. XXIII, 418
- ³⁰ A.R.E.,419 of 1907, *S.I.I.*, Vol. XXIII, 419
- ³¹ *Theni Maavatta Thirukoilkal Vazhikatti*, TNHRCE, Tamilnadu,2014, pp.31, 82-85 and
Field visited by the author.