

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PALANI A STUDY

¹P.Valarmathi, ²Dr.R.Meera

¹Research Scholar, Sri GVG Visalakshi College for Women, Afiliated to Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, India

²Associate Professor & Head, Sri GVG Visalakshi College for Women, Udumalpet, India

Abstract: Palani was one of the part of the Kongu Country. The early sangam works refer to Kongu as an independent territorial division. It was surrounded by the Western Ghats and the hilly regions such as, south of Mysore and included the present day districts of Coimbatore, Erode and Salem (excluding Attur taluk), Karur, Kulittalai taluk of Trichy district and Palani taluk of Dindigul district. The Sangam literature Akananuru and Purananuru mention this place as Pothini belonging to the Vel chieftain Nedu-Vel-Avi. Society of Palani is primarily a caste-ridden society like other part of India. Since the ancient times down to the present day, the caste structure of society remains the same, but the increase in the number of sub-caste is a phenomenon peculiar to any caste-based society. From the early day's agriculture, weaving and trade were the main occupation of the people. Different religious families live Palani to develop secular attitude towards their counter-parts and they, live in complete harmony with one another.

Keywords: Palani, Vaiyapuri Nadu, Pothini, Idumbankullam.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the political history of the study area, there is no distinct evidence to rule directly by any kingdom or dynasty or chieftain in particular. From the earlier to till date Palani is a part of dynasty or country or land or place. So, the land has no proper or distinct history or no definite record to show the political history particularly. The area did not have any urban centers or cities. So, the inhabitants were only graziers and poor cultivators. The earliest available evidences are thin and they did not speak about the human history of the people directly. But due to its environment, difficult passes and feverish jungle, the adjacent invaders might have been tempted to conquer the place. For the reason that, the region became the bone of contention between the kings of the Gangas of the north, the Cholas of the East, the pandyas of the South and Cheras of the West[1].

2. LOCATION

From the early Christian era, Palani is one of the part of the Kongu Country. The early sangam works refer to Kongu as an independent territorial division. It was surrounded by the Western Ghats and the hilly regions such as, south of Mysore and included the present day districts of Coimbatore, Erode and Salem (excluding Attur taluk), Karur, Kulittalai taluk of Trichy district and Palani taluk of Dindigul district[2]. But, Kongu Nadu remained a separate region either increasing or decreasing in size according to the valour victories of the rulers. Palani was one of a territorial division known as vaikavurnadu, named after the main settlement Vaikavur or Aviyur which in the present Palani. The other names mentioned about these territorial divisions were Avinadu, Vaikavinadu, vaiyavinadu and Vaiyapurinadu, all denoting the same region[3].

In early Tamil text of Thirumurukatrappadai palani has been mentioned as the third padaiveedu[4]. This was the southern end of the Kongu Nadu and edicts refer to this place as Vaiyapuri Nadu, which was ruled by the king VaiyapuriKopperumpekan[5]. One of the impartant clan group settled in this area was Aviyarkudi. One of the famous Vel chieftains who ruled this region was Vel-Avi-k-ko-p-perumpekan.

A legend associated with the Sangam Age, who ruled this part of the territory, speaks on the generous act of the chieftain [6]. According to the Sangam literature Purananuru [7], the ruler Pekan swathed a blanket to protect the peacock from the cold. The peacock also became vehicle (Vahana) of the Lord Muruga, one of the ancient deities of the Tamils. One of the important clan groups settled in this area is Aviyarkudi. But the association of peacocks with grave is more important and its significance is yet to be ascertained in the present context.

3. POLITICAL CONDITION

Some Sangam poets who spoke on this chieftain were Kabilan, Vanparanar, Aricil-Kilar and Perunkunrur-Kilar. The Sangam literature Akananuru [8] and Purananuru [9] mention this place as Pothini belonging to the Vel chieftain Nedu-Vel-Avi. Further, the place Pothini is noted as a Pon-udai-nedu-nagar-pothini meaning the big town Pothini having gold. This came to be called as Palani later.

As per sangam poem Paditruppattu [10] another important chieftain Vel-avik-ko-paduman had matrimonial relations with Cheras who ruled this region with capital at Karur (ancient Karur-Vanji) located on the confluence of the river Amaravathi with Kaveri [11]. Due to his close relationship with Cheras, this chieftain Velavi-k-ko paduman had a palace near Vanji. The Sangam poet Porunthil Ilangiranar hills from the village Porunthal. He had sung three songs, two in Akananuru [12] and one in Purananuru [13].

In Purananuru, he composed a poem in praise of Chera king MantharalCherallumporai, who ruled from the Chera country with capital at Karur and believed to be issued inscribed coins with a title Kollipporai [14] datable to 1st century AD.

After the sangam period, the region was sometimes ruled over by the Chera Dynasty [15]. The hill temple was believed to be constructed by the Chera king CheramanPerumal. There is an interesting story connected to this temple and the Chera king. When the king went the king was touring the Palani hills, Lord Muruga came and gave a darshan in his dream. He instructed the king to rebuild the hill temple. The Chera king went up the hill and really found the idol of Murugan. He with all devotion rebuilt present temple [16].

In the medieval period, the area was under the domination of the Pandyas of Madurai. The outer shrine wall of the Murugam temple there are many inscriptions found. They are made by the Pandya Kings such as, sadayavarma sundarapandiyar and Sadavarman veerapandiar. The edict of Sundarapandiyar is the oldest of all [17]. He was known as Kongupandiyar and was the famous king of the later Pandya Dynasty. He ascended the throne in 1251 AD. From the inscriptions on the wall, he came to know that and donate land and villages to this temple for the purpose of conducting the pujas [18]. In the year 1300 AD the king Jatavarman sundrapandya, gifted a village for carrying a special daily Puja (Avani Vendha raman sandhi) in his name [19]. The temple of the Goddess Periyannayaki Amman with the town, acts as the point of reference. The Pandyan emblem of two fishes can be seen on the walls, which makes one to believe that the area was under domination of the Pandyan kings of Madurai.

In the 10th century AD, the imperial Cholas ruled over the entire South India, Palani was also ruled over by the Chola Kings. At that time, Cholas built many Siva temples [20]. The inscriptions found that the temples speak about the donation of the Kings. From the 7th century AD to 12th century AD however they stand out as towering monuments proclaiming the glory of the Chola regime and its commitment to the arts and culture [21].

The Madurai Nayaks rule in Madurai began after the collapse of the Vijayanagar Empire in 1565. The Nayaks were originally the Governors of Madurai. To facilitate the smooth running of the empire, the vijayanagara rulers had appointed Governors for its different territories. Once the Vijayanagar Empire began to disintegrate, the Nayaks of Madurai proclaimed themselves as rulers. Madurai began to flourish under the Nayaks. Thirumalainayakar was the most prominent amongst the Nayak rulers. Palani was under the influence of the Thirumalainayakar and was rule over by the Palayakkarars at various points of time, [22] who were appointed by the Nayaks of Madurai, to the administration of city. Palani was then under the rule of the Palayakkarars of Balasamudram, considering the fact that there are numerous people of the Nayakar caste (the same as the Nayak kings of Madurai), who claim descent from what is modernday Andhra Pradesh and who retain some traces of the Telugu tongue, in Balasamudram, it is more than probable that their ancestors were given charge of the fort of that place by the kings of Madurai and held its control long-after their sovereigns had been displaced [23].

In the year 1742, the Mysore army under the leadership of Venkatarayar conquered Dindigul. He governed Dindigul as a representative of Maharaja of Mysore. There were Eighteen Palayams (a small region consists of few villages) during his region and all these Palayams were under Dindigul Seemai with Dindigul is the capital. These Palayams wanted to be independent and refused to pay taxes to Venkataraya. In 1748, Venkatappa was made governor of the region in place of Venkataraya, who also failed. In 1755, Mysore Maharaja sent Hyder Ali to Dindigul to handle the situation. Later Hyder Ali became the Maharaja of Mysore and in 1777, he appointed PurshanaMirsahab as governor of Dindigul.

In 1783 British army, lead by Captain Long invaded Dindigul. In 1784, after an agreement between the Mysore province and British army, Dindigul was restored by Mysore province [24]. In 1788, Tippu Sultan, the Son of Hyder Ali, was crowned as king of Dindigul[25].

In 1790, James Stewart of the British army gained control over Dindigul by invading it in the second war of Mysore. In a pact made on 1792, Tippu ceded Dindigul to the English. Dindigul is the first region to come under English rule in the Madurai District [26]. In 1798, the British army strengthened the hill fort with cannons and built sentinel rooms in every corner. The British army, under Statten stayed at Dindigul fort from 1798 to 1859. After that Madurai was headquarters of the British army and Dindigul was attached to it as a taluk [27]. Dindigul was under the rule of the British until Indian got our Independence on 15th August 1947.

4. SOCIAL CONDITION

Society of Palani is primarily a caste-ridden society like other part of India. Since the ancient times down to the present day, the caste structure of society remains the same, but the increase in the number of sub-caste is a phenomenon peculiar to any caste-based society. An increase in the number of sub-caste has been taking place continuously with varying degree of stagnation and mobility from the emergence of caste system.

Palani being s cosmopolitan city, consists of people belonging to different religions and caste. The Hindus, the Muslims and the Christians live in this town. Among the Hindus, we find Brahmins, Gounders, Mudaliyars, Chettiars, Muttaraiyars, Pillais, Sourashtras, Naidus, Nadars, Harrijans, Sathatha Srivaishnavas and several communities. The Brahmins held a high position in society by virtue of other spiritual authority and services to the alien rulers. They had easy access to state administration as well [28].

5. ECONOMIC CONDITION

The term "Arukot Tiyaanaip Pothini" and "Ponnudai Nedunagar Pothini" denotes, that Palani was a flourishing city in the ancient period [29]. From the early day's agriculture, weaving and trade were the main occupation of the people. After independence, the economy began to take a definite shape and much importance is attached to agriculture and industries. When the temple grew in its importance it provided livelihood to artisans, intellectuals, industrialists, traders and businessman. Besides agriculture, preparing Panchamirtham, Vibuthi, Sandal Paste, Printing, Weaving, Carpentry, Siddha medicine are the other occupations of the people. Very few service Industries like rice and oil mills had come up.

Agriculture is the main occupation of the people of Palani. The rich fertile agricultural and hilly trackes in the environment provides an agricultural based cultivation for the 21.48 percent of the work force in the Palani town. The total area of agriculture in palani was 3, 33,773,230 hectares. This shows the extensive area available for cultivation in palani area. From the above government memo it is understood, that several varieties of crops were raised in the cultivated 5,149 hectares. Next is the sugarcane which is raised in 1,149 hectares. The other grains raised were millet in 226 hectares, maize in 310 hectares and pearl millet in 26 hectares and Tinai and Varagu each in one hectare, chilly and vegetables in 300 hectares, cotton is raised in 122 hectares and oil plants in 545 hectares. Since Palani town is situated at the foot of the Western Ghats. It produces carrot, cauliflower and beatroot and is marketed in the Palani town. The total area under commercial use is 18.94 hectare. There are daily and weekly markets in the town. The daily market (Gandhi market) is located in the Gandhi Road, Palani [30].

Palani is not blessed with an abundant rain monsoon because the entry of monsoons is prohibited by the Western Ghats. So the farmers mainly depend on tanks and wells in former days. Idumbankullam and vaiyapuri tanks still remain a perennial source of water for agriculture. Two dams were built across the rivers varadhananadhi (1974-1978) Palaru – Puranthalaru, which flow from the Palani hills. There are 12 canals and 4293 wells and the area of land irrigated is 4,189

hectares. The total numbers of tanks in Palani are 51 and they irrigate 3,790 hectares of land. Through there are Shanmuganadhi and varattaru they are not suitable for irrigation and they are used only when there is a heavy rain. The Palani town has not attracted more industrialists to start industries so far. Few service industries like textile, rice and oil mills had come up. The individual economy of Palani revolves around the temple because majority of them are connected with the temple.

6. RELIGIOUS CONDITION

India is a land of different religions. Religion plays a predominant role in all walks of life. Different religious families live in Palani to develop secular attitude towards their counter-parts and they, live in complete harmony with one another. Religious institution plays a significant role in the day-to-day life of the community. There are 39 temples 5 Mosques and 3 Churches in the Palani town. Lord Arulmigu Palani Dhandayuthapani Swamy Temple attracts a number of pilgrims from all over the country [31].

There is a Tamil proverb meaning “Don’t live in a place where there is no temple”. Temple is a place where peace is expected to be attained. Today Palani is well known as a prominent pilgrim centre and is considered to be one of the earliest towns in South India. The temple in Palani belongs to the ancient days, and the town is popular throughout the state especially in the southern part as the abode of Lord Muruga. In Palani there are 39 temples. The important temples are Palani hill temple, Arulmigu Periyannayagi Amman temple, Lakshminarayana Perumal temple, Padrakaliamman temple and so on. In Palani four important annual festivals are conducted and they are in the order of their importance. Panguni Uthiram, Thai Poesam and Kandasashti, Mariamman Festival and Vaikasi Visakam.

Other festivals of importance are Thirukarthigai, Thai Amavasai, Tamil New Year, and the festival of the Cauvery on the 18th of Aadi. Throughout the Tamil month of Margazhi (mid December to mid January). Thiruppalli Ezhuchi is celebrated with the temple being opened at 4 A.M for special poojas.

7. CONCLUSION

Palani is one of the important pilgrimage centres in India and the most famous abode of Lord Muruga. Its antiquity is known through the inscription records, Tamil literature and other historical evidences. Tamil literary works such as Tolkappiam, Ahananuru, Purananuru, Pathitru-p-pattu, Sirupanarru-p-padai, Silpadhikaram, Madurai-kanchi, Thairmurugatrupadai speak about Palani, which was under the hegemony of different rulers in Tamil Nadu right from the ancient times [32].

The Sangam rulers, early Pandiyas, Kongu Cheras, Latter Pandia rulers, Hoysalas, Vijayanagar rulers, Nayaks, Mysore rulers and the British ruled Kongu Nadu including Palani over a period of time [33]. Many social groups and religious are live together with harmony people engage in agriculture and other occupations. There are temples Mosques and churches to show their integration and harmony.

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