Administrative division of early South India with special reference to
Thenganadu of Aii Kingdom

Dr.B.Jishamol

Abstract

Thengapatnam is forty-five kilometres before Thiruvananthapuram, on the road from Nagercoil. The present village Thengapatnam has an antiquity importance such as the present Pazhverkadu. The present Pazhverkadu, the ancient Pulicat was the important trading centre of the Dutch. In the same manner the importance of Thengapatanam has been inscribed in the Parthivapuram Copper plates. Parthivapuram is a temple very close to Thangapattanam. The importance was that it had a Vedic College (Salai) and Parthivapuram Copper plates refers to the Salai. But its historical importance is lesser known to present scholars. This paper tries to highlight and bring out the historical importance of Thengapattanam, a place occupied by the early Cholas, Cheras, Pandayas and the Aii chieftains in the 9th century AD. The paper also highlights the important administrative division called nadu as Thengapattinam was one of the nadas during the Aii kings that is Thenganadu has been transformed as Thengapattinam.

Introduction

Thengapattanam1 is forty-five kilometres before Thiruvananthapuram, on the road from Nagercoil. Thengapattanam in the map of India or Tamilnadu is hidden or lesser-known with extraordinary beauty with coconut groves, paddy fields and banana plantations and has historical value from the 7th century AD onwards. Pattanam are the sea shore areas, or centres flourished in coastal areas same as, Thengapattanam, Nagapatinam, Kayalpatinam and Madraspatinam. “If Kerala is described as God’s own country its border Thengapattanm a distance of about 25 kilometers away from Kerala must be it”.

1 Dr.B.Jishamol, Assistant Professor, Department of History, Ethiraj College, Chennai, jishapbk@gmail.com.
**Geography**

Thengapattanam the little fishing hamlet is surrounded on one side by the Arabian Sea and the other side by the coastal village. An estuary is formed by the Valiyar river, a tributary of the Tamiraparani River at the end. On other sides it is covered with waterways, the backwaters, the paddy fields, the mountainous and the coconut groves. The Thengapattanam Sea or the beach has a special attraction of tall huge waves.iii These huge waves are caused by the Pozhi, (the merging of the river with the sea.) The estuary is one of five on the East Coast. The local people have a belief because it is a “Penkaddal” a female sea which is angry and furious always. The river Kuzhithurai meet the sea, what makes a palm fringed fresh water lake, locally called Kayal.iv Thengapattanam is a major tourist attraction in the Kanyakumari district known for its sea, river, canal, paddy fields, Rocky Mountains and lush green groves.

**Aim of the Study**

Thengapattnam is forty-five kilometres before Thiruvananthapuram, on the road from Nagercoil. The present village Thengapattnam has an antiquity importance such as the present Pazhverkadu. The present Pazhverkadu, the ancient Pulicat was the important trading centre of the Dutch. In the same manner the importance of Thengapatanam has been inscribed in the Parthivapuram Copper plates. Parthivapuram is a temple very close to Thangapattanam.vi The importance was that it had a Salai (a place to provide education) and Parthivapuram Copper plates refers to the Salai. But its historical importance is lesser known to present scholars. This paper tries to highlight and bring out the historical importance of Thengapattanam, a place occupied by the early Cholas, Cheras, Pandayas and the Aii chieftains in the 9th century AD.

The Aiiis were the natives of this soil. They were one of the ruling dynasties like the Pandayas and the Cholas. The Aii occupied a vast region between Tirunelveli and Travancore. This territory at times seems have extended up to the Coimbatore and the Palaghat regions. They are considered as chieftains who ruled from various regions, but considering their area of influence they cannot be included in the list of chieftains but as a ruling dynasty.vii The paper also highlights the important division called naduviii as Thengapattinam was one of the nadus during the Aii kings that is Thenganadu has been transformed as Thengapattinam.
**Nadu: Political structure of Chola segmentary state**

The structure of the Chola segmentary state – its capital, intermediate, and peripheral zones with their differentially segmented internal divisions – according to Burton Stien⁹ was not explicit in the numerous inscriptive records nor in various genre of literature of the age. Stien further states that it is an inferred structure. Lacking an explicit, relevant, contemporary theory of the state. Hence the theory of segmentary state proposed by Southall is most appropriate.

Attention has been drawn to the administration of nadu of the Chola Empire by Prof. Y. Subbarayalu in his *Political Geography of the Chola Country* (1973). Though Prof. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri was the first historian to dwell on the administrative devices of the Cholas, his study has not thrown much light on the administration of nadus, whereas he has given importance to the role of the autonomous villages, the sabha administration of Brahmadeya villages. Perhaps, the deficiency in the Cholas of Prof. K.A.N. Sastri made Prof. Subbarayalu to specialize on the nadu administrators under the Cholas. This study gave the needed impetus to Prof. Burton Stein to apply Southall’s concept of “Segmentary State” to the Chola Empire and the Vijayanagar Empire. Prof. Stein in his much talked about book *State and Society in Medieval South India* (1980) has made an attempt to study about the role of nadus in the overall Chola administration. He has questioned the premises of Prof. K.A.N. Sastri’s theorizing of a byzantine monarchy and introduced the concept of Segmentary State and tried to establish that the Chola Empire was administered by the Nattar of nadus rather than a central administrative body. These studies of professors Sastri, Subbarayalu and Burton Stein has given needed support to extend the study of the Nadus in Aii Kingdom.⁹

The Thirukkural lists down certain conditions for any territory to be called as a nadu, they are: “a kingdom is that in which (those who carry on) where a complete cultivation is carried on by virtuous persons, and merchants with inexhaustible wealth, dwell together (Kural 731)”;⁶¹ Again, it speaks of some inherent weaknesses of a state that the king has to guard against. “A kingdom is that which continues to be free from excessive starvation, irremediable epidemics, and destructive foes” (Kural 734). Further, the book says that a state (nadu) should be free from irregular associations, destructive internal enemies and murderous savages who (sometimes) harass the sovereign (Kural, 735). In addition, the stat (nadu) should have the benefits of the two
types of water – waters from above and from below – well situated hills and an indestructible fort (Kural 737).xii If all the above conditions are fulfilled, then a territory is called a state (nadu).xiii

**Chieftains of South India**

The medieval South Indian political system was based upon states which were ‘segmentary’. In this sense it cannot be differentiated from the political system of most off the subcontinent at the time. Localised political units were capable of being linked loosely and symbolically, to kings whose sovereignty might for a time be recognized by local chieftains. South Indian kings and dynasties of the medieval age, beyond the localities of their own power, were symbols of authority and legitimacy for a vast number of chieftains throughout the macro region. It did not matter if the rulers were Tamils, for their sovereignty to be recognized among Kannada or Telegu speaking chiefs.xiv But the chieftains also rose to the position of kings when ups and downs prevailed among the kingdoms. This can be considered with regard to the Aii kings, it was a ruling dynasty, always at war with either the Pandyas, or with the Cheras or both of them. However it was a buffer state between the Pandayas and the Chera kingdoms.xv

**Nadus in the Aii Kingdom**

The Aii kingdom, in the early centuries comprised of Kollam, Kottarakkarai, Nedumangadu, and Chengottai, parts of Tirunelveli, Trivandrum, Neyyattinkarai, Nanjil nadu and Valluva nadu. But it shrank to very limited areas during the early medieval times, because of the emergence of the Pandyas and then the Cholas. What we have from the *Parthivasekharapuram Copper-plates* is a very restricted area, perhaps the whole of the present day Vilavancode and Kalkulam Taluks. The reference to the existence of the administrative division called the nadu is clearer when speaking about the key to the political geography of the Aii kingdom. In a three-tier administrative device, the nadu occupies the middle position. However, we do not have much detail about all the nadus that existed in the Aii kingdom in fact; we have the names of only a few nadus. This is based on the *Parthivasekharapuram copper-plates* and the Huzur officexvi plates of Ko-Karunanadadakkam and Vikramaditya Varaguna of the later Aii Kingdom.
**Number of Nadus**

The above records mention about only seven *nadus*. These can be identified with the present day places in the Kanayakumari district and parts of Thiruvananthapuram district. These *nadus* belong to the period of Ko-Karunandadakkan (875 to 890 AD). There might have been other *nadus*, but details are not available. In fact, a *nadu* called *Tuma nadu* is not mentioned here. The *nadus* mentioned in the above records are:

1. *Thenga nadu*
2. *Mudala nadu*
3. *Polis-ul- nadu*
4. *Padaippa nadu*
5. *Chengazhu nadu*
6. *Valluva nadu*
7. *Omaya nadu*.

These *nadus* were again divided into desams (ur, kadu and karai). Each *nadu* was under the head called *Kizhavan*.

**Early History of Thengapattanam**

*Thenga nadu* is the first one mentioned in the Copper-plates of AD 856. *Thenga nadu* may refer to the area now called Thengapattinam and its neighbourhood. Perhaps area including Muttam and its neighbouring is a fishing coast, it is a part of modern Vilavancode Taluk, at a distance of 15 kilometers from Kuzhithurai, the taluk headquarters.

Today it is a small coastal belt with its occupation of fishing, coconut rope making. It is a meeting place of the Arabian Sea and the Tamraparani River. In local term it is known as *Pozhi*.

Thenga *nadu* was also under a *Kizhavan*, known as Thenganattuk*Kizhavan*. He looked after the administration of Thenga *nadu*. He was *Kizhavan* alias Sattan Murugan. He was in charge of the arrangements of the *Salai* and the temples and *Sattars* of the *Salai* were punished at times of internal problem and they were to pay *thandam* (fine). This *Thandathokai* (fine) was collected by this *Kizhavan*.
The Huzur record belongs to the eighth year of the reign of Vikramaditya Varaguna dated in the month of panguni, when the king was sojourning at Tirunandikkarai. It mentions one Murugan Senthhi, the daughter Vikramaditya Varaguna. She was also called Aiikula Mahadevi. It also mentions that she was granted some land for her enjoyment. That land was Merkodu a part of Valluva nadu, xxvi which is in the modern Kalkulam Taluk known as Mekkodu. The marriage alliance makes it clear about the honour granted to the Kizhavan. Thus they were not mere administrative officers, but more or less equal to the status of the king.

Tenganattukkizhavan figures in the period of both Ko-karnandadakkan and Vikramaditya Varaguna. Parthivapuram and the Hosur Office plates belong to the period of both the rulers proves that Varaguna immediately succeeded Ko-Karunandadakkan of the Aii Kingdom. xxvii

In the up-keep of the Parthivasekharapuram temple, Thenganadu had a major role to play. The lands granted for making the payment of the temple servants were mostly from Thenga nadu. xxviii Talaivilappil in the village of Vilappil, Havenattu Nallur, Idainrkkkal, Panaiyur and Piyalaru were all included in this nadu. This has been mentioned in the second side of the second Huzur office plates. xxix Though these are mentioned as forming part of this nadu these places have not been identified yet. However, it might have comprised of a very large area.

This historical village has been forgotten for its ancient glory and remembered only for its geographical beauty at present.

Decline of the Aii Kingdom

The Aii kingdom had a glorious history, but in the 8th century they were reduced to a position of local chieftains. This decline is probably by the Pandyas in the north and the Cheras south. Their decline was caused by various reasons such as:

When the Pandyas grew from strength to strength the Ais nearby them also grew. But, according to the statecraft a powerful state will never alloW a small state near it to grow. This naturally made the Pandayas to suppress and destroy the Ais.

The Ais being the buffer state between the Cheras and the Pandys, when discontent arose between the two the Ais had to bear the burnt.
The Pandyas were sea-faring people by nature, the Aiis must have been a hurdle for their movements towards through Vizhinjam, Muttam and Thengapattanam. The Pandayas were one of the important trading dynasty of the early times, they are known for pearl fishing.

Vizhinjam and Kottarr were the important trading and military centres of the Aiis, these trading ports could have attracted the attention of the great powers.

The Pandya kings were always anxious to annex the Aii kingdom. Taking advantage of the weakness, the Pandyas invaded it on many occasions. The Pandya attacked the Aiis at Vizhinjam; it was a wealthy port and a naval power. Vizhinjam was also a place of producing military goods and a very important military centre. This place was also a wealthy place covered with coconut groves and there is evidence that pearl fishing prevailed in Vizhinjam, which attracted the eyes of the monarchs. They destroyed the fort covered by three side by sea, it had pearls and diamonds on the walls. Thus in 781 AD the Pandyas captured Vizhinjam.

Conclusion

Kanyakumari has many important historical facts to be anlysed, such as the history of social religious movements’ history of personalities and the history of the Travancore rajas, related to the current history. But the once glorious Thengapattinam in the past is only a fishing hamlet today has many historical and cultural importance that has to be unearthed. According to this research the Parthivapuram Copper Plates of Ko-Karunandadakkan speaks of the Parthivapuram Salai built in the model of the Kandalur Salai in Thiruvananthapuram. The copper plate make mention of the land as granted to the temple and the Salai from various divisions of Nadus and Urus. As mentioned earlier Thenganadu is a division mentioned in the plates which has transformed as Thenganadu. The surprise is that even after centuries the nadu bear the same name with slight modifications. One of the main lack of present Kanyakumari District is, it does not have a University, but in the 9th century the Aii kings established a Salai equal to university. The only reference for this is the Parthivapuram Copper Plates which highlights about the salai. This paper gives a brief note about the administrative divisions of Nadu and ur based on this copper plates of the Salai.

*****
According to Burton Stein, he states that it is difficult to assume these settlements designated as Pattinam, Nagaram, or puram which are usually meant to cities or towns by modern researchers – were ‘centres’ in the sense of being qualitatively different from most other settlements of a locality of the macro region. (Burton Stein, Peasant state and society in medieval South India, Oxford University Press, 1980, P. 242)


x. Ibid. Pp.46-47.

xi. Thirukkural , 731

xii. Thirukkural , 737


xvi. The Parthivapuram copper plate and Hosur copper plates of the Aii King Karunandadakkan – throws a flood of light on the nature of an organization of Cattas called Salai.

xvii. Elankulam P.N.Kunjanpillai, Chera Empire in the 9th and the 10th Centuries, P.62.


xix. Elankulam P.N.Kunjanpillai, Chera Empire in the 9th and the 10th Centuries, P.62.


xxiii. Students of the Salai, teachers are also called as sattars.

xxiv. Fine had to be paid in the Salai by the punished students.

xxv. “பிழைக்கப் பபசுவார் ஒருகாசு தண் டப்படுவது இப்பரிசு ததங்கநாட்டு தவண்கநாட்டு தவள்ளாளன் ததங்கநாடு கிைவ (Travancore Archeological series, Volume.1, pp, 15-37)

xxvi. ......நான்கான் கீழ்வரும் பக்தர்கள் உயிர்த்துவாய்ப்பு பார்க்கின்றனர் இன்று உயிர்த்துவாய்ப்பு காண்போம் கேட்டோம் முன்னேட்டுப்பக்தியாளர் போன்ற இந்த மகளே மகளர்ப்பர்.........

(Ibid.) Now Mekkodu is a small village situated between Muttom and Monday Market.

xxvii. Travancore Archeological series, Volume. 1, pp, 15-37

xxviii. Ibid.

xxix. .................திருநூற்றாண்டு மகள் அழகு தோன்றிய பார்க்கின்றோம்
இன்னாட்படன் இளபவணாட்டு

இந்நாட்படன் இழடநீர்

மழனதுரும் பியாவாறும்

(Hozur plates in Travancore Archaeological Series., Vol. 1, pp. 15-37)

xxx. T.N.Subrahmanian, South India Temple Inscriptions, Vol-III, Pt.II P.14