

SRI MARGASAGAYA ISHVARAR TEMPLE AS GLEAND FROM THE SAMBUVARYAR'S INSCRIPTIONS OF VIRINCHIPURAM

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Abstract

Socio-economic condition focuses on the socio-economic aspects of the temple. The inscription given a clear picture of the important communities and reveal the type of interactions that the temple had with the people of Virinchipuram. With available inscription from the temple, a glimpse of economic life of the people of this region is gathered and presented. the inscription throw light on different aspects of the economic life like the unit of measurements of land, fixation of price, valuation of gold coin and measurement of grains, liquids ect, in the day to day pujas and festivals of the temple ,

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INTRODUCTION

Virinchipuram is one of the saiva sacred places in South India that lies in North latitude 12° 55.5' and East Longitude 79° 1', on the right bank of the river Paláru at about 14 km west of Vellore, the head quarter of the present Vellore District. This place is well connected by road and rail. The national high ways coming from Chennai to Bangalore runs through it just 1 km away in the Southern direction. The Southern railway runs on the norther side of the place. The Virinchipuram village is located in the centre of Vellore taluk and ancient Tondaimandalam¹. The Tondaimandalam covers the area between the Bay of Bengal in the east, the coral mountain in the range of Eastern Ghats in the west, Venkata Mountain in the north and the river Pinagi² in the south. Physio geographically the Virinchipuram region³ is situated in between 12° 39' - 12° 57' N and 78° 39' 79° 13'E, west of Madras at a distance of about 135 km. It is bounded on the north by Gudiyattam, on the east by Arcot, on the south by Polar and Arni and on the west by Vaniyambadi towns with an area of about 1000 square miles.

Historical Background of the Temple

The Margasagaya Iswara temple of Virinchipuram has a rich tradition connected with the patronage of great rulers like Pallavās, Chōlas, Later Pandyas, Sambuvarayās and Vijayanagar rulers in different periods of South Indian history. To understand and to get a proper perspective of the temple and its history, it is necessary to study the broad outline of the historical background of the temple and the Virinchipuram region.

Generally, the history of a particular region throws light on various aspects of different rulers and their dynasties, the administrative divisions, the provincial and local quarters and socio, economic, political and religious impacts over this area from time to time. Accordingly, an attempt is made to bring out a glimpse of the historical background of the temple and the region from pre-historic to Vijayanagar times under several periods viz., Pre-historic period, and early historic period up to Pre - Pallavā, Pallavā, Chòlas, Later Pandyas, Sambuvarāyās and Vijayanagar.

The history of this region and the temple has been sketched with the aid of numerous stone inscriptions mostly available from the temple and its nearby places. In addition, the literary and copper plate records also supplement the present work. The Archaeological and excavation reports are the main source materials for writing the pre-history of the region.

The Sambuvarayar's inscription

The Sambuvarayar were one of the important feudatories of imperial Chola and later Pandiyas. In the beginning they served as chief administrators and generals under Cholas. They were exercising their sway over portions of undivided south Arcot, North Arcot and chengalpet districts with Padavidu as their capital¹. The earliest known Sambuvarayar chief is sengigeni Satta Nalayiravan alias Karikala chola sengini nadalvan 1068 C.E a vassal of Adhirajendra Chola² 1067 C.E 1070 C.E .the prominent among Sambuvaraya of chola period was Sambukula perumal Attimallan Rajagambira Sambuvaraya 1236 C.E 1267 C.E .he began his career as chola vassal durig Rajaraja-III and who declared independence in 1258 C.E .it is confirmed by his two record³ dated 1258 C.E and 1268 C.E which do not refer to any overlord.Rajendra-II Cholas pre occupation with Hoysalas and the Pandyas must have facilitated the Sambuvaraya to become independence. It appears that Rajagambhira founded the sambuvaraya king called Rajagambhira Rarjya with its capital at padaividu (Tiruvannamalai District)⁴. He also built and endowed the Ammaiappeeswara temple⁵ there.

The independence of Sambuvaraya must have been a very short period and later become subordinate to the Telugu-Chola ruler Vijaya Ganda Gopala, Kadavaraya ruler Koperunjinga and the Later Pandyan as referred to above .The greatest chief under later Pandyas were Virachampan alias Edirili Chola Sambuvaraya 1306 C.E-1317 C.E and Ekambaranathan Kulasekara Sambuvaraya 1306 C.E 1330 C.E in the time of the latters subordination the Pandiya Empire was in a state of deterioration caused by the war of succession between the two sons of Maravarman Kulasekara Pandya and the subsequent invasion of Muslim 1311,1319 and 1324 C.E when the pandiya lost their power to the hands of muslims, there was no proper control over their chief. Sambuvaraya fished in the trouble Wates.. Circumstances tempted them to seek political gains. In the year 1324 C.E -1339 C.E declared independence and stated arresting his rule in the portion of undivided North Arcot, South Arcot and Chengalpet Districts of Tamil nadu⁶

This independent rule continued till the defeat of Rajanarayana Sambuvaraya –I (1337 C.E - 1362 C.E) by the vijayanagar ruler Kumara Kampana S/o Bukka-I in 1362 C.E which is discussed in the succeeding pages. Therefore the Sambuvarayas administered independently for the second time in the region from 1324 –C.E 1362 C.E⁷

The Sambuvaraya assertion over the region is learnt from their records found in this temple. There are more than 19 epigraphs of Sambuvarayas available in this temple. Out of which 13 inscriptions are issued during their subordinate position (1068C.E-1324 C.E) and 6 record seem to have been issued during their independent period (1324 C.E-1362 C.E).the earliest of Ammaiappan Alagiya Chola Sambuvaraya, chief of Kulottung-III as referred to above .their last inscription is dated 1361 C.E of Rajanarayana Sambuvaraya –III 1356 C.E-1379C.E⁷

The independent rule of Kulasekra Sambuvaraya was for a very short period and he was succeeded by his son **Sakalaloka Chakaravarti Ekambaranthan Venrumankonda Sambuvarayan**. He had not only strengthened his position, more powerful but also saved the country from Madurai Sultanate, who made an attack over northern Tamilnadu from 1324 C.E. 1330 C.E. the Muslim invasion is mentioned in an epigraph of Venrumankonda Sambuvaraya from Thiruvamattur (Villupuram) as follows:

“Munnal Thurukkar Vandu thiruvasalgalum niraiyal kulaindu desamum Alindu Kidakkaiyil”.

As venrumankondan Sambuvarayan and his father Kulasekara were more powerful in northern Tamil Nadu, Muslims founded their Sultanate in Madura⁸. His political authority over the region is asserted from an inscription found in Gangayanallur, a village nearby Virinchipuram⁹.

The next ruler and his elder son **Rajanarayana Sambuvaraya-I** alias **Mallinathan** (1337 C.E -1363 C.E.) succeeded to the throne. His inscription issued in his 7th year dated 1344 C.E.¹⁰ is found in the temple. It records the grant of land for conducting daily Pujas (worship) of the temple. This order was made by the king when no regular pujas were conducted in the past due to financial crisis. This ruler also known as Rajakambhiran, Virakambiran, Virachamban¹¹ etc.

Following his inscription, a record of his younger brother and joint ruler **Rajanarayana Sambuvaraya-II** alias **Ponnin-Tambiran** (1338 C.E – 1362 C.E)¹² the second son of Venrumankonda Sambuvaraya is found on the eastern wall of second prakara. It is issued in 13th regnal year dated 1360 C.E. The inscription registers a grant of land and a house site by the trustees of the Margasagaya Iswara temple to Arippalideva, probably a servant of the temple¹³.

In the course of their independent rule, Maravaman Virapndya (1334 C.E. to 1388 C.E.) a rival of Sambuvarayas, invited Vijayanagar rulers to check the growing strength of Sambuvarayas and to save Tamil country from Muslim rule. Vijayanagar Prince Kumara Kamperna took an advantage and marched towards the northern part of Sambuvaraya territories around 1350 C.E¹⁴. In these circumstances Rajanarayana-I installed his son **Rajanarayana Sambuvaraya-III** alias **Tirunirru champam** (1356 C.E – 1379 C.E.) as a King in 1356 AD. Probably for the safety of the government.¹⁵

Rajanarayana-III's governmance over the region is ascertained from his inscription found on the south wall of the second prakara of the temple. It is issued in his 5th year dated 1361 C.E. The record referred to the grant made to Varadaraja temple of this place¹⁶.

Other than these records we come across three fragmentary epigraphs. They bear only the name portion 'Sakalaloka-Chakravarti Rajanarayana' supposed to be anyone of the above mentioned three Sambuvaraya rulers¹⁷.

The Vijayanagar prince Kumara Kampana and his son Sayana gradually captured most of the Sambuvaraya territories in a short period from 1359 C.E. to 1361 C.E. At last in 1362 C.E. two hot battles took place, first at Virinchipuram, secondly at Padavedu, the capital of the Sambuvarayas in the second battle, Kumara killed Rajanarayana-II, the younger brother of Rajanarayana-I. The ruler Rajanarayana-I surrendered and Kampana was kind enough to establish him on the throne. However Rajanarayana-I retired from politics and died in 1363 C.E. Rajanarayana-III ruled 1362 C.E.-1379 C.E. as a subordinate to the Maha mandaleswara of Mulbhagal Rajya of Vijayanagar kingdom. The fate of the Sambuvaraya family after 1379 C.E. is not known and the sovereign of Vijayanagar rulers began to extend over the Virinchipuram region.¹⁸

The Temple Administration

During the early Christian era, the temple was the nucleus around which centered the religious, social and cultural life of the people. The temple had inspired and sustained private piety and private piety was expressed in the form of gift individuals and state to the temple. The facilitated proper temple administration. As a great centre of learning from very early period, the temple attracted many ruling dynasties of ancient Tamil Nadu to make substantial gifts of cash and kind for the maintenance and development of all the institutions connected with it. The temple served as a hospital and a service agent for relief to the poor. In short as an all pervasive institution, the medieval temple played a vital. Thus the history of every important temple forms an indispensable key to the regional history.

Temple as a commercial centre

In the medieval period the temple were the nucleus around which villages, towns and commercial centres were flourished. Temples were indirectly helped for the promotion of trade and commerce in the village, generally temples were surrounded by numerous shops selling various commodities needed to the pilgrims and for the worship of the presiding deity. On the occasion of festival and fair, the temple attracts thousands of pilgrims and consequently the enormous increase in the sales will benefit the trading community. Usually varasandhi or weekly fair in addition to fairs at the of festivals are conducted around the temple. An inscription assigned to the 13th century C.E of this temple shows that virinchipuram become an active commercial centre in the medieval period. The record made mentions that the imposition among themselves of magamai tax on article of merchandise at certain specified rates in favour of the god margasagaya iswara who changed green-green into pepper, by the merchants of the eighteen countries trading in the four direction (Nangu Tisai Padinen Vishayattar)¹⁹

Land measures

The third record of this kind found in the temple dated 1339 of Rajanarayana Sambuvaraya-II (1338-62 C.E) made mention tuni (4marakkal) as a grain measure.²⁰

Sambuvarayar Coins

In the independent rule of Sambuvarayas, the coin *panam*²¹ was in current. it is also learnt from an inscription that *panam* was a gold coin. in the succeeding period of vijayaagar²², the gold coin pon was found in current in this region. it is known from an inscription of bukka-II dated 1402. in the context of granting hundred pon²³ for dug a tank here

CONCLUSION

Sri Margasagaya Iswara temple had played a very important and significant role in the religious, social, political, economic and cultural history of the people of Virinchipuram village and its surrounding areas. This is evident, in particular, in the cultural dimension which includes art and architecture and other value centric aspects of historical development. Sri Margasagaya Iswara temple is another classic example of how temples had played crucial roles in sustaining human civilization in the past.

It is apparent that the historical ramifications reach forward into the present, putting the present in perspective, providing an objective reflection of the multifarious aspects that go into the making of a human conglomerate. True to its name, 'Sri Margasagaya, the Virinchipuram deity, guides or points to the past towards a better present and a possibly greater future. This is the essence of history and this study underscores this fact; even a small village and it's not so big temple, can stand up to be a beacon of our heritage, culture, art and values to be emulated.

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