

Glimpses Of Nanguneri From The Light Of Epigraphical Sources

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to describe the early history of Nanguneri from the light of inscriptions of Early Pandyas and later Cholas. Nanguneri is one of the earliest settlements of TamilNadu. Nanguneri is situated in the grid of 8° 48' north latitude and 77° 67' east longitude.¹ It is nestling beneath the western ghats which is 462 feet above the sea level.² Nanguneri is located twenty nine kilometers south of Tirunelveli, the headquarters of the Tirunelveli District of TamilNadu lying on the Tirunelveli – Kanyakumari road.³ It is also in between the Tirunelveli and Nagercoil railwayline. It is on the northern bank of river Nambiyaru and also in the lower valley of Nambiyaru.⁴ Nanguneri has 17.28 square kilometers of land.⁵ The name Nanguneri is derived from Nangu-Eri.⁶ Nanguneri is surrounded by four lakes Nanguneri is also known as SrivaramangaiNagar Sripurusamangai, Srivaramangalam and Thothathri shetra. This place was ruled by the Pandya King NedumChadiyaparanthagan (765 – 796 C.E.) who was also known as Srivaran. Hence the name of the town was called by the Srivaramangai.⁷

Keywords: Nanguneri, Nambiyaru, Sripurusamangai.

Introduction

Nanguneri was a forest land. It has witnessed a succession of human settlements from Paleolithic times to present. Archaeologists believed that this region must have been a part of the home of early man in South India. There are reasons to believe that Paleolithic human occupation did exist in the forest and river Valley of Nanguneri and this human occupation must have formed part of a border Paleolithic culture system of South India. The maintain western ghat has yielded a number of Neolithic implements like Urns⁸.

Nanguneri which is situated between Tirunelveli and Valliyur. From Sangam period onwards It was ruled by Sangam Panyas Kalabhras, Medival Pandyas, Cholas, later Pandya Vijayanagar, Tirunelveli Pandyas, Nayaks. Arcot Nawab and English from 1801⁹ onwards to till date Nanguneri served as the headquarters of Nanguneri taluk. Now Nanguneri is one among the thirteen taluk in Tirunelveli District. The Western Ghats which start near Kanyakumari run straight from the Northern limit of the Tirunelveli district as far as to Papanasam. Its chains functioned as important strategic passage to the Cheras Pandyas and Cholas and supplied suitable stones for the construction of buildings forts and temples. Mahendragirimalai and Thirugurukudi mountain a chain of western ghats and mountain ranges are situated three kilometers west of Nanguneri at Kadampoduvalvu and Rajakkalmangalam. The Western side of Nanguneri are covered with forests that give products like mango and coconut.

Thiruvaimoli is a seventh century literary work which refers Nanguneri and Vanamamalai temple¹⁰.

From early days Nanguneri has been one of the subdivisions of Tirunelveli region and the rulers who had jurisdiction over Tirunelveli region or Tenpandi region wielded the same magnitude of rule over Nanguneri. In other words Nanguneri was ruled by the same rulers of Tirunelveli region. In the age of Sangam, the Tirunelveli region had been considered as a country and has a part of the Pandya kingdom¹¹. It is worthy that the pandya kingdom was vast and spacious. It had its boundary upto Kanyakumari in the South Vaigai river in the north western ghats in the west and Bay of Bengal in the east. From this one can infer that the Tirunelveli country and it is one of the subdivisions known as Nanguneri was located in between Travancore Kingdom and the Madurai Kingdom.

The Ancient Pandya rulers ruled the Tirunelveli Seemai by dividing it in the many sub-divisions. They were Kallakadu, Karunguvalanadu, Kannipurathayanadu, Keelavembunadu, Ten Aryanadu, Manadu, Meelavembunadu, Mullainadu, Vallanadu, Valudhivalanadu, Vananadu, Vaikuntavalanadu and Nanjilnadu¹². Sangam works clearly mention that the foundation of Pandya Kingdom at Madurai was laid down by Kulasekarapandya during the first century B.C. Besides he was considered as the patron of Agasthiar who later retired to Puthigai hills¹³. The Sangam age came to the stage of disappearance about 300 A.D. over 2000 years ago. In his Tamilbook on medicine Agasthiar mentioned the medicinal value of Nanguneri Vanamamalai oil well¹⁴.

After the eclipse of the Sangam age, the alien rule of the Kalabhras was extended over Pandya country¹⁵. They let loose repression and subjugated the Tamils. The Kalabhras inter regnum lasted for nearly three hundred years ending with sixth century A.D.¹⁶.

The credit of extermination of the Kalabra rule in the ancient Tamilagam goes to Pandya Kadungon (575-600 A.D.) He defeated the Kalabras towards the end of sixth century¹⁷. He laid his seat at Madurai towards and had his sway over Tirunelveli region including Nanguneri. Indeed he was considered as the founder of first Pandya Empire¹⁸. Though he established the first Pandya Empire, he was considered as a descendent of the Sangam Pandya.

His successors Maravarman Avanisulamani (600 – 620 A.D.) Maran Sendan (620-642 A.D.), Maravarman Arikesari (642-700 A.D.), Kochadayan Ranadheeran (700-730 A.D.), Maravarman Rajasimha I (730-760 A.D.), Jatilaparantaka Maransadiyan alias Varaguna I (760-810 A.D.), Rajasimha I (810-825 A.D.), Varaguna Maharaja II (815-835 A.D.), Sreemara Sree Valabha (835-862 A.D.), Varaguna Varma III (862-880 A.D.), Veerananarayana Sadaiyan (862-905 A.D.) and Rajasimha III (905-943 A.D.) ruled over Four Centuries over the Madurai, Tirunelveli region including Nanguneri¹⁹.

Maravarman Arikesari (642-700 A.D.) alias Maran Jadaiyan, 35th regnal year 656 A.D. inscription found on a slab lying in a field in the Parachcheri of Dalapathisamuthiram situated near Nanguneri²⁰. 770 A.D. second regnal year of Pandya Jatilaparandaga Maran Sadaiyan or Sadaiyan Maran, Varaguna I found on the North wall of center shrine in the Rajasimheswarar temple at Kottaikarungulam in Nanguneri Taluk²¹. 796 A.D. inscription of Varaguna I found on the stone belonging to the Nambi temple in Tiruggurukkangudi²². Maransadaiyan alias Varguna I forty third regnal year 801 A.D. inscription found on a boulder in Irattaiptall rack in Eruvadi²³. 794 A.D. inscription of Varaguna I found on the South wall of the Manonmanieswarar temple in Vijayanarayanam²⁴. During the rule of Varaguna I, one Neddumsadaiyaparanthagan alias Srivaran (765-796 A.D.), a Pandya chieftain of this place ruled in an around Nanguneri. Hence the Nanguneri was called by the Srivaranmangalam²⁵.

The eclipse of the first Pandya empire began with the Varaguna II and lasted for about one hundred and fifty years Varaguna III the Pandya ruler was defeated by the allied confederacy under the Pallavas at Tiruppurambiyam in 880 A.D. In the field of religion during that period the Nayanmars spread Saivaite principles where as Azhwars preached moral disciplines. The Echo of their preachings was heard a lot in Nanguneri, for Nanguneri was a junction for both Saiva and Vaishnava principles in the Tirunelveli Region²⁶. Pandya Viranarayana Sadiyen (862-905 A.D.) married Chera princes named Vanamadevi.

Parantaka Chola defeated Rajasimha III, the Pandya ruler and captured Madurai and its different parts in 943 A.D. Virapandya son of Rajasimha III killed the Chola governor and established himself on the throne of Madurai in 946 A.D. In 964 A.D. Virapandya was defeated by the Sundarachola alias Parantaka II in the battle field at Cheyor and he escaped to the forest. In 973 A.D. Virapandya made one more attempt to regain his patrimony, but he was killed in the battle in 973 A.D. by Aditya III son of Sundara Chola Parantaka II, Virapandyas 12th regnal year 958 A.D. inscription found on the the south wall of Manonmanieswarar temple in Vijayanarayana²⁷. Rajaraja I (985-1016 A.D.) defeated the Amarabhujangapandya in 995 A.D. the Pandya country for the first time come under the rule of cholas of Tanjore. The Pandya country there after named as Rajarajamandalam. During the rule of Rajendrachola I (1012-1044 A.D.) a Chola representative was appointed to look after Madurai and Tirunelveli region including Nanguneri in the name of Chola Pandya. Rajaraja Cholas I 10th regnal year 995 A.D. two inscriptions found the west wall of the central shrine in the Vijayanarayana temple²⁸. Another two inscriptions belong to the 16th regnal year 1001 A.D. and 17th regnal 1002 A.D. of Rajaraja chola I found and the north and south wall of central shrine in the Manonmanieswara temple in Vijayanarayanam²⁹.

Jatavarmasundarachola (1020-1044 A.D.) the son of Rajendrachola I became the first Chola Pandya ruler of Madurai. After him his successors Maravarmanvikramachola Pandya, Jatavarmancholapandya, Maravarma parakiramachola pandya served as representatives over the pandya country of Tanjore crown. But it was stopped during the rule of Kulotunga I (1071-1122). The reason for mismeasure was due to the uprisings of the Pandyaking.

Jatavarmansundara Chola Pandyadeva 10th regnal year 1028 A.D. inscription found on the north and west walls in the Manonmanieswarar temple in Vijayanarayanam³⁰. 1099A.D. Seventeenth regnal year inscription of Jatavarmansrivallabha found on the west wall in the central shrine of Tirunageswarar temple in Nanguneri³¹. Jatavarmansrivallabhapandyas Twenty Second regnal year 1104 A.D. inscription found on the stone called Vaniyankallu near tank in Vijayanarayanam³². Srivallabha's 17th regnal year 1099 A.D. inscription found on the west wall of central shrine in Tirunageeswarar temple in Nanguneri. Jatavarmansrivallabhapandyas Twenty Second regnal year inscription found on North and west walls of

central shrine of Manonmanieswarar temple in vijayanarayanam³³. Another inscription Srivallabha found on the south wall of central shrine in the Athinathaperumal temple in Vijayanarayanam³⁴.

During the rule of Rajathirajachola II (1146-1173 A.D.) Jatavarman Kulasekhara Pandya, the son of Srivallabha the ruler, the southern part of Pandya country who had his headquarters at Tirunelveli. His brother parakiramapandya ruled over the northern part of Pandya country had his capital at Madurai. The Separation of power was significant one because the ten pandya country existed separately³⁵. A civil war broke out between the Pandya brothers (1165-1168 A.D.). In that civil war Parakiramapandya was killed and Madurai was captured by Jatavarmakulasekharapandya. But with the help of Srilanken forces Virapandya, the son of Late Parakiramapandya resumed his power. At this Juncture Jatavarmakulasekhara Pandya shot the help of Chola ruler of Tanjore. He gave timely help and saved the problem. But Jatavarma Kulasekhara, chase of alias with Parakirama Babu of Ceylon created strained relation between the Pandya and Chola rulers. It resulted in the reinstallation of Virapandya as Pandya ruler. At this time Kulasekhara died his son Vikramapandya sought the succor of the chola rulers. As a result Vikramapandya became the king. Enraged by the incident Virapandya with the help of Chera ruler attacked. Madurai but the attack was crushed by the retaliation of the Cholas under Kulotunga III. Vikramapandya ruled Madurai Tirunelveli region untill 1190 A.D. He kept cordial relations with Kulotunga III. Yet his son Jatavarmakulasekhara (1190-1216 A.D.) wished to free himself from the grip of Chola ruler. By doing so he put the strongest nail on the coffin of the chola rule asking waters in the Pandya country. His successors ruled the pandya country untill the fourteenth century A.D.³⁶

Towards the close of eleventh Century the Chola power started its downward and the Pandyas began raising their heads. They appear to have regained their independence about the middle of the twentieth century as is evidenced by a civil war between Parakramapandya and Kulasekhara the two princes. In the later sixties of the 12th century (1165-1168 A.D.).³⁷ Vikramapandya besieged in his capital Madura by his rival Kulasekhara applied to Parakramabahu the king of ceylone for aid with the help of general Lahkapura Dananatha of Ceylone Kulesekhara took Madurai and killed Parakrama his wife and some of their children. Lahkapura effected a landing in the face of opposition and Launched a prolonged campaign on behalf of Virapandya a son of Parakirama, with the help of Ceylonese. Pandyas one of Kulasekhara got the support of Kulotunga III Chola and captured Madurai. Between the death of Vikramapandya and the year 1190 A.D. There are known to have existed a large number of Pandya rulers several ruling at the same-time over different parts of the Kingdom of them the most important perhaps the chief rulers at Madurai appears to be Jatavarma Srivallabha (1170-1190 A.D.) and his successor Maravarmasundarapandya. Kulotunga Chola Ist 35th regnal year 1105 A.D. inscription found the east and south wall of Rajasimheswarar temple in Kottaikarungulam of Nanguneri taluk³⁸.

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