

A Tamil Inscription

from

The Fort Frederick

TRINCOMALEE - SRI LANKA

Paper presented by

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(N.Sethuraman)

Introduction

The holy Shiva shrine which once stood on the Trincomalee (Tamil Tirukkonamalai) mountain in Sri Lanka was one of the two hundred and seventy five sacred Shiva temples praised in the Tamil Thevaram poems. Thirujnana Sambandar who existed in the 7th century composed eleven hymns praising Lord Shiva who was pleased to be present at Tirukkonamalai (mountain) (Thevaram 3-123). He says that those who recite and hear these verses will become great and they along with their relatives will go to the heaven (indicating the Kayarohana philosophy of the Pasupata Saivite school). Sekilar the minister of the Chola emperor Kulotunga II (1133-50) became a saivite saint and in 1139 A.D. he wrote the great Tamil epic Periyapuramam -- the story of the sixty three nayanmars. He beautifully describes how Tirujnana Sambandar praised in his hymns about Lord Shiva of Tirukkonamalai. Arunagirinathar who lived in the first half of the 15th century praises lord Muruga of this temple.

Dr.K.Indrapala has edited the Nilaveli inscription in the pages 64 to 69 in the James Thevathas Ratnam Felicitation volume edition June 1975. The record is indited on a stone which is built into a temple structure and is now serving as part of the step of the thirtha well at the entrance to the inner Mandapa of the Vinayaka temple at Nilaveli North of Trincomalee. The photoraph is also published. Indrapala correctly states that the record is in the character of the 10th century. The object of the inscription is to grant certain lands for food offerings to the great God Masyakeswaram Udaiya Mahadeva at Tirukkonamalai in Konaparvatam. The measurements and the boundaries of the lands are given. The record further states that these lands which belong to Konamalai Nilakantar (Shiva) should be under the protection of the Maheswaras. Indrapala opines that Masyakeswaram Udaiya Mahadeva was a different temple and not the Main Shrine. With due respect, I have to differ from the great scholar. We must note here that the lands gifted to Masyakeswaram Udaiya Mahadeva belong to Konamalai Nilakantar. This shows that the two names refer to the same God. Masyakeswaram called after the fish which was the first Avatara of Lord Vishnu--in view of the sea near the rocks--was the name of the Devadana Temple and Tirukkonamalai was the place name of the mountain. If this understanding is correct, we may not be far wrong in surmising that the slab which contains this record was originally in the main shrine before its destruction. (We have a parallel example in Tamilnadu, see Sambandar Thevaram 3-62. He praises the Lord of Thatakai Eswaram in the vilge Tiruppanandal. Inscriptions of

this temple state Lord of Thatakai Eswaram a Devadana in the Brahmadeyam Tiruppanandal. Thataka in Sanscrit means Palmyra tree. Panandal in Tamil also means Palmyra tree. Even today the village is situated surrounded by Palmyra trees. The Sthala Vriksha of the temple is also Palmyra tree.)

In the beginning of the 16th century the Portuguese came to destroy the temple at Trincomalee. The Dutch captured the Kalani Malai Shiva temple which was situated south of Trincomalee. Viswanatha Nayaka of Madurai drove out the invaders, established the rule of the Telugus and saved the temple from destruction. In 1620 Raghunatha Nayaka of Tanjore also defeated the Portuguese at Ceylon. However the fate was otherwise. In 1624 the Portuguese general Constantino de Saa pulled down the golden temple and used the materials to build the Fort Frederick in its place. This was a severe blow to the culture and heritage of the great island. Since the old temple has gone, the people worshipped the mountain itself as Dakshina Kailaasa, the abode of lord Shiva. The fort exists even today. After three hundred and forty years, a very big Shiva temple called Koneswaram was built in 1964 on a different site in the high mountains. The good old traditions, customs and the rich heritage were once again restored.

In this article attempt is made to prove how in the 16th century the Telugu Nayaks of Madurai and Tanjore fought with the invading whites to protect the island and the Tirukkongmalai Shiva temple.

Subject

At the outset I would like to thank Mr. Theva Rajan, General Secretary, Thaninayakam Foundation Trust, Colombo Sri Lanka, whose letter dated 10th January 1994 prompted me to prepare this article. He sent to me many source materials and also the xerox copies of the pages 448 to 451 from the Journal R.A.S.(Ceylon) Vol.XXX-Published in 1927. In these pages, H.W.Codrington wrote an article about the Tamil inscription at Fort Frederick, Trincomalee. The first four paragraphs of the article and the photograph of the inscription attract our attention. They are reproduced below:

"The legendary history of the great temple Koneswara which once stood upon the promontory now occupied by Fort Frederick at Trincomalee, is given in the Kalveddu; a precis of this work appears in Brito's Vaipavamalai. The temple is said to have been founded by King Kulakkodan, son of Manuventan, in the Kali Yuga year 512 (B.C.2590). It was destroyed by Constantino de Saa in 1624 and the materials used for the construction of the fort.

On the right side of the main entrance to the existing fort is an inscription cut beneath two fishes. On the left side of the gateway immediately opposite appear two



The Tamil Inscription from The Fort Frederick
Trincomalee - Sri Lanka

other fishes; the workmanship of these is much inferior to that of the first mentioned pair. The local tradition is that the stone on the right side of the gateway came from the great temple and that the inscription contains the following prophecy:-

"முன்னே குளக்கோட்டன் மூட்டு திருப்பணியை
பின்னே பறங்கியர் பிடிக்கவே -- மன்னுகேள்
பூனைக்கண் செங்கண் புகைக்கண்ணன் போனபின்
மானே வடுகாய் விடும்."

"The Portuguese shall take the holy edifice built by Kulakkodan in ancient times. Oh King, hear! After the cat's-eyed one, the red-eyed one and the smoke-eyed one have gone, the figure will be that of the Vadugar - (Telugus)".

About the identity of Kulakkodan, the renovator of the stone temple, the scholars in Sri Lanka differ. His existence either in the 11th century or in the 12th is proposed. I am not going to deal with this controversy. As far as we are concerned Kulakkodan existed prior to the date of this inscription. The inscription is damaged and the available portion was read by Codrington as follows:

	<u>Text</u>	<u>Transliteration</u>
1	(மு)ன்னே குள	(mu)nne Kula
2	கோட்டன் மூட்டு	k(o)ddan muddu
3	(தி)ருப்பணியை	(ti)rup-paniyai
4	ன்னெ பறங்கி	nne paranki
5	(க்)கவே மன்னு	(k)kave manna
6	ன டொண்ண	na ponna
7	(சா)ன யியந்(று)	(sa) na yiyarr(u)
8	(தே)தவைத்	t(e)vait
9	(ன்)னூ..	(n)na
10	..கள்..	.. kal

Codrington says, "the earliest mention of the inscription is in the Portuguese original of "Beschryving and Carten Eyland Ceylon" preserved at the RIJKS-ARCHIEF, The Hague, the letter-press of which dates from about 1627. The initial and final letters are missing owing to the stone having been cut. The first five lines of the inscription clearly agrees with the traditional prophecy. The remaining lines do not, since they are damaged. The

Dutch and the Portuguese versions represent the above text."

The Ceylon literature Koneswar Kalivettu, chaste Tamil poem written in the 16th century states thus¹

" that while the sacred pujas by the brahmanas in the Konainathar Shiva temple were conducted for a long time, the Parankis (Portuguese) whose bodies shine like the tender mango leaves would come with the intention of destroying the great temple. South of Tirukkonamalai there was a mounatain called Kalani malai on which stood a Shiva temple. That would be captured by Ulandar (Dutch). At that time the Ceylon Royal family would shrink. After the shrinking of the royal family, the Vadugar (The Telugus) would rule Lankai (Sri Lanka). The Telugus would find that the parallel rule of the Ulanda King (Dutch) would be a hindrance to them and therefore the latter would be pushed down into the sea (would be driven out). With all happiness, after setting up the alternate rule, the Telugus would then worship the God in the Golden temple of Konainathar".

Some people including the European scholars thought that it was a prediction written in the inscription and also in the poems about the coming of the Europeans. But none was able to explain the rule of the Telugus which would be established there.

Dr.A.H.Mirando wrote an article "The Konewaram Kovil and the Homeland Question in the Sri Lanka newspaper "The Island" magazine dated Tuesday the 4th January 1994. While referring to this inscription, he quoted the opinions of the previous scholars who made research on this lethic record. The relevant passage of this article is reproduced as follows:

"H.Krishna Sastri, the Madras Government Epigraphist has recorded as follows:

The record may belong to the 16th century A.D. to judge from palaeography adding further that 'the pair of the fish' the emblem of the Pandyan Kings almost certainly is earlier in date than the 16th century by which time the Pandyan Kingdom had ceased to exist, perhaps they were carved in the 13th century when Pandyans came into contact with Ceylon and Trincomalee'. (Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch vol.no 80).

Dr.Godakumbura is of the view that the fish symbols have nothing in common with the inscription as an examination of the inscription shows that it is a 16th century record inscribed on a stone which already had the Pandyan symbols.

Dr.S.Paranavitana states thus about this inscription: 'A fragmentary inscription

engraved below the double fish on a stone now built into the gate of Fort Frederick in Trincomalee is also interpreted as a prophecy and sometimes quoted to support the historicity of the prophecy given in the Yalpana-valpava-malai. This inscription actually contains the word 'Paranki' (Portuguese) but the record is in the 16th century script and was no doubt set up after the arrival of the Portuguese.

This inscription has been interpreted as a prophecy about hundred years after its date for it was so explained to Constantino de Saa, who destroyed the Trincomalee temple. But at that time the prophecy took into account the Portuguese. The Dutch and the English have come within the scope of the prophecy, in later times after these nations played their part in the History of Trincomalee (Arya Kingdom In North Ceylon, Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Ceylon Branch Vol. vii New Series 1961, p.177 foot note)."

The problem which the scholars faced in interpreting this inscription is this: The record is no doubt in the character of the 16th century. (I am also convinced that it belongs to the 16th century when I saw the xerox copy). But the two fish emblem which belongs to the Pandya's gave trouble to the scholars. In the 16th century Pandyas were very weak and ruled a small area around Tenkasi-Tirunelveli District in Tamil Nadu. They were under the protection of Vijayanagar rulers.² They could not have defeated the Portuguese or Dutch. Scholars could not explain the mention of the Telugus in the context of the then research and it was completely omitted as if unnoticed.

Let us see the inscription and the poem Koneswar Kalvettu from the side of the Tamil Nadu History. The two fish emblem, 16th century writing and the rule of the Telugus clearly suggest that some Telugu King or Nayak who adopted the Pandyan fish emblem invaded Ceylon, drove out the European invaders and engraved this record. Who was that Telugu king? The discovery of a coin at Kuttalam in Tirunelveli District answers this question. On the obverse of the coin the two fish emblem and above it the legend Pandyan are found. On the reverse the legend Viswanathan is written.³

The legends are in the character of the 16th century Tamil. The coin was issued by Viswanatha, the Telugu Nayak who ruled from 1510 to 1564. His capital was Madurai which was once the traditional capital of the glorious Pandyas who ruled from before the beginning of the christian era. Therefore it is obvious that Viswanatha styled himself as a Tamil Pandyan King. Against this background if we once again look at the Fort Frederick Tamil inscription and the Ceylon Tamil poem Koneswar Kalvettu we can easily surmise that it was Viswanatha Nayaka the Telugu king who defeated the Portuguese and later the Dutch.

Krishna Devaraya the Vijayanagar emperor ruled from 1504 to 1529. In 1510 he appointed Viswanatha Nayaka Governor of Madurai and the latter ruled till 1564.

Two inscriptions coming from Manlambalam and Kandiswaram Udalyarkoil-Pudukkottai district, Tamil Nadu belong to Krishna Devaraya and they are dated 1511 and 1519 respectively.⁴ In the records the emperor claims to have conquered Elam and Yaipana. Achuta Devaraya his younger brother also participated in the campaign.⁵ A record coming from Tirupattur, Ramnad District, belongs to Achuta Devaraya and it is dated 1535. It states that Achuta made grants to the temple for the welfare of Viswanatha Nayaka.⁶ This clearly shows that the emperor had great regard and affection towards Viswanatha and he was much concerned about the welfare of the Governor. Another record of Achuta (1529-42) coming from Devikapuram states that Achuta conquered Elam (Ceylon).⁷ We have already seen that Viswanatha, the Telugu Nayak styled himself as a Tamil Pandya and adopted the two fish emblem. Krishnappa Nayaka was the son of Viswanatha. The Poem Singala Dvipa Catha states that Krishnappa also invaded Ceylon.⁸ About this campaign Satyanatha Aiyar says,

"The Singhala Dvipa Catha gives a long account of Krishnappa Nayaka's conquest of Ceylon. It has such a convincing appearance of truth about it that it is highly probable that an expedition was undertaken. A brief summary of the chronicle may be given here. Krishnappa Nayaka was spoken of slightly by the king of Kandi, a friend of Tumbichchi Nayaka, because of the latter's execution. Outraged at this, he called for the services of fifty-two of his Pologars with their troops, and embarked for Ceylon at Navapashana and landed at Mannar. A conciliatory message requiring homage and tribute was rejected by the king of Kandi, who sent 40,000 men under four mantris (ministers) and eight desanathalu (governors) to arrest the progress of the invaders. A sanguinary engagement took place at Puttalam, in which the Kandian army was defeated by Chinna Kesava Nayaka (the general who finally put down the rebellion of Tumbichchi Nayaka) with 20,000 troops and a few chiefs. Two ministers, five chieftains, and others were taken prisoners, and treated with much humanity and consideration by Krishnappa Nayaka. The captives urged their king in vain to yield. The latter collected 60,000 troops and 10,000 Kaffirs (probably Portuguese), and marched at their head to the battle-field. A bloody struggle ensued in which 8,000 Kaffirs and about as many Sinhalese lost their lives. In spite of the best efforts of Krishnappa Nayaka and his general, the king of Kandi was not captured alive. His dead body was taken with due honours to the capital. The Madura ruler remained there for three days. The deceased king's family was sent to Aurangam, the old capital of Ceylon, and treated in a fitting manner. After appointing his brother-in-law, Vijaya Gopala Nayaka, his viceroy in Ceylon, and arranging for the regular payment of tribute, Krishnappa Nayaka returned to Madura.

This account represents the Madura Nayak in the best light possible. It may have been written by one of the adherents of the Nayaks. It gives very elaborate details, and is very precise and sober, though some of its statements cannot be accepted without qualification. The cause of the invasion seems to have been the withholding of the usual tribute. This subordinate position of Ceylon with regard to Madura is intelligible in the light of the claims

of the Vijayanagar emperors, Krishnadeva, Achyuta, and Sadasiva Rayas, to have conquered Ceylon. According to the chronicle abstracted above; homage and tribute were demanded even before actual fighting began; and in the end arrangements were made for the proper remittance of tribute."

These source materials when inserted into the framework of the then period give us a clear picture of the events and we may not be far wrong if we surmise as follows:

Krishna Devaraya and Achutha Devaraya could have conducted two independent campaigns against Ceylon. These campaigns were under the command of Viswanatha Nayaka and he was the real hero who should have taken pains in driving out the Portuguese and later the Dutch and established the rule of the Telugus in Ceylon. Telugu king Raghunatha Nayaka, the Vijayanagar Governor at Tanjore also claims to have conquered Yalpana and the Portuguese in 1620. This is confirmed by the Telugu poem Raghunathapudayam. This information also agrees with the Ceylon Tamil poem Koneswar Kalvettu which states that the Telugus would drive out the Portuguese and Dutch, establish their own rule and worship the God (Shiva) of the Golden Temple.⁹ The Frederick Fort Inscription and the Koneswar Kalvettu Tamil poems are not predictions. They are real events told in the form of prediction. The Portuguese again established their rule in Trincomalee, pulled down the great Shiva temple and used the materials to build the Fort Frederick in 1624.

Viswanatha's campaign should have been conducted in the first and also in the second quarter of the 16th century. At that time the inscription was engraved and the poem was composed as predictions. The inscription mentions not only the Portuguese but also the whites cat's-eyed one, red-eyed one and smoke-eyed one who were naturally both Portuguese and the Dutch. Hundred years later in 1624 when the Portuguese read the inscription they thought that it was really a prophecy. Even today some scholars believe in the same way. Actually it is not a prediction. It tells the real events of the history in the form of a prediction.

I am once again thankful to Mr. Theva Rajan who was kind enough to send to me necessary source materials collected in Sri Lanka

Foot Notes:-

1. Courtesy - Selvi K.Thangeswari, Mattakkalappu, Sri Lanka - Kulakkodan Dharisanam: page 37 - Koneswar Kalvettu verses 45 and 46.

"சேர்ந்தபின்னர் மறையோர்கள் கோணைநாதர்
 திருப்பூசை வெருகாலஞ் செய்யு மன்றால்
 மாந்தளிர்போன் மேனியுடைப் பறங்கி வந்து
 மஹாகோணைப் பதியழிக்க வருமந்நாளி
 லேய்ந்த தென்பாற் கழினிமலையென் றொன்றுண்டாய்
 கீசனுக்கு மாலய மங்கியற்றப் பின்னர்
 கோந்ததுறை சேரொல்லாதந் பிடிக்கு மந்நாட்
 குலவுசீங்க விரவி குலங்குறைந்து போமே,"
 (45ம் பாடல்)

"போனயின்ன ரிலங்கைமுற்றும் வடுகராள்வார்
 புகழிலங்கை தனிபுரக்கு மூலாந்தா மன்னன்
 தானிலங்கு மரசிங்கனுக்குத் தடையென் றெண்ணி
 தரியலனைக் கடலிடையே தள்ளிவிட்டுத்
 தேனமரு மலங்கல்புனை வடுகன்றானுஞ்
 செப்பிய மாற்றரசு மகிழ்கொண்டே கோணை
 மான பரனகமகிழ் பொற்கோயிலுக்குள்
 மாதனத்து மீதுவைத்து வணங்குவாரால்,"
 (46ம் பாடல்)

2. N.Sethuraman - The Later Pandyas - Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India - Vol. XX -- 1994.
3. Tamil Coins - pp 167-168 - Published by the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology.
4. Pudukkottai Inscriptions - 730 & 732
5. Ibid Pd - 743
6. A.R. Ep. 113 of 1908
7. A.R. Ep. - 1913 page 123.
8. History of the Nayakas of Madura--R.Sathyanaatha Aiyar--Edition 1924 pp 70 and 71.
9. "The last kings of Kandy (Sri Lanka) were not Tamils from Cholamandalam for they are designated Vaduga and Nayakars. The Nayakars were chieftains from the Vijayanagar kingdom of the Tungabadra River". - Dr.A.H.Mirando's article in "The Island" (Ceylon) magazine dated Tuesday 4th January 1994 page II col.3 para 8.

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