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THE LEGENDS OF TENKASI PANDYA KINGS IN TAMILNADU, INDIA

G. Chitra Parvathy

Research Scholar, Department of History,
Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu .



Tenkasi Viswanatha temple that the Tenkasi Pandyas exercised independent authority in the Tenpandi region.¹The very fact, that Parakrama Pandya could undertake and complete the construction of the temple town and make it his capital, bears testimony to his high political authority and enormous financial resources. He is said to have scored a number of victories over his enemies, including the Chera ruler. Parakrama's successors were crowned in the Tenkasi temple and their generous endowments to the temple as recorded on its walls; throw light on successive rulers of Tenkasi region. Most of the Tenkasi Pandyas assumed high sounding titles and epithets.²

ABSTRACT

The copper plate inscriptions of the Tenkasi Pandyas refer to some legends. According to those inscriptions, Tenkasi Pandyas belonged to the dynasty of the Chandiran (the moon). One of the Pandyas was wearing the garland of Indhiran (the Celestial Lord). A Pandya king fought against Indhiran and threw his arm called 'Valai' on Indhiran's crown. A Pandya king marched his herd of elephants in the battle held between the Pandavas and the Govravas, what is called the "BharathaPor". A Pandya King threw his lance and thereby the

ocean became dry. These legends might not have happened during the very period of the inscriptions, but they would have been the traditional stories even long before the installation of the copper plate inscriptions. The inscriptions tell upon the traditional stories which date back to hundreds of years. A brief description of the traditional sections is presented in this paper.

KEYWORDS: Garland, Kings, Pandyas, Tenkasi.

INTRODUCTION

It is evident indeed from the epigraphical records found in

The Legends

The copper plate inscriptions of the Tenkasi Pandyas refer to some legends. According to those inscriptions,

- Tenkasi Pandyas belonged to the dynasty of the

Chandiran (the moon).

- One of the Pandyas was wearing the garland of Indhira (the celestial lord).
- A Pandya king fought against Indhira and threw his arm called 'Valai' on Indhira's crown.
- A Pandya king marched his herd of elephants in the battle held between the Pandavas and the Govravas, what is called the "Bharatha Por".³

• A Pandya King threw his lance and thereby the ocean became dry.

These legends might not have happened during the very period of the inscriptions, but they would have been the traditional stories even long before the installation of the copper plate inscriptions. The inscriptions tell the traditional stories which date back to hundreds of years. A brief description of the traditional stories is given here under.

Chandhirakulam (The Dynasty of Chandhira)

The Pandyas used to say that they belonged to Chandhirakulam. The literature that depicts the story of Kovalan and Kannagi, speaks of this fact, as 'MalaiThingalVazhiyon' (the descendent of the moon), and 'ThingalSelvanThirukkulam' (the dynasty of Chandran's son); A line in Chilappathikaram reads 'ThennavarKulamuthal, Chandhira', i.e. Chandran, the origin of Thenpandi dynasty. Apart from these, some other literatures also give information about the Pandyas.

Pandya King Adorned with Indira's Garland

The copper plate inscriptions of the Pandyas throw light upon the fact that the Pandyas got adorned with the Indira's Garland. Chilappathikaram gives references to this as, Sengam Ayiranthonthirai Vilangaram Pongoli Marpirpoondon Vaazhi (Chilambu 11:24, 25) which means 'Long live the king who is adorned with the Indira's Garland. on his hectic shoulder', and also as, "Thevarikon poun AaramThennarkonMaarpinave" (Chilambu-AaychiyarKuravai) which means, 'the celestial God, Thevar is on the shoulder of the King of southern region'.

The same point of the traditional story has been referred to in ThiruvilaiyadalPuranam also. Some of the Chola's copper plate inscriptions give the information that the Pandya king of 18th century was defeated by Chola King and so, he surrendered his crown and the Indira Garland to the Chola King; and then he had an asylum in Chera kingdom.⁴

Pandya King got seated on the Throne of Indhira

Some of the Pandya's copper plate inscriptions speak of that one of the Pandyas shared the throne of Indira and got seated with him. This is also said to be a traditional story. ThiruvilaiyadalPuranam also gives reference to this traditional story.

Pandya's Valai Thrown at Indira's Crown

Some copper plate inscriptions of the Pandyas speak of the traditional story that one of the Pandyas threw his 'Valai' (a weapon) at Indira's crown. This traditional story is given in Thiruvilaiyadal Puram too. Chilappathikaram also gives reference to the event as, 'Kotrathaldippadai Vanavan Mudithalai Udaitha Thodithol Thennavan' which means "The king of the southern region who broke the crown of the celestial God (Vanavan)".

Herd of Elephants sent into the 'Bharatha Battle'

There is a traditional story that one of the Pandyas sent his team of elephants into the 'BharathaPor'. Copper plate inscription found in Chinnamanur gives reference to the event mentioned above thus, "MaratharMalaikalathuAviyaBharathathilPokatottiyum" which means. 'He (the Pandya King) drove the

elephants into the field of Bharatha battle so as to destroy the soldiers in the battle field'. Yet, this event has not been referred to any other inscription or literature.

Pandya's Command over the Demons

One of the Pandya King had a command over the demons (Boodhams); he ordered the demons to repair and clear the lakes and pools in his region. This event has been referred to in the small copper plate inscription of Chinnamanur as 'BoothaganamPaniAndum' which means; also he commanded the group of the demons.⁵ The same event has been referred to in the big copper plate inscription, of Chinnamanur as, 'thadamboothampanikonduthadakangalpalathirunthiyum' which means also the renovated many tanks with labor done by the big demons (thadamboodhan).

Obtaining Ambrosia by Churning the Ocean

It is said that one of the Pandya kings churned the ocean and obtained ambrosia (amudham) there from. The small copper plate inscription of Thalavaipuram also speaks of the same as 'Kadal Kadaindu Amirdhu Kondum' meaning 'Churned the ocean and obtained ambrosia (amirdhu)'.

Throwing the Lance to dry out the Ocean

It is said that one of the Pandyas had thrown lance so as to dry out the ocean. The big copper plate inscription reads "vemmunaivelonruvittumviraivaravilkadalmeettum" which means (he) threw a sharp lance and got the ocean dried out swiftly/quickly.

The small copper plate inscription of Chinnamanur reads, "Odhanmmeelavelerindhum" which means that he and threw lance so as to dry out the ocean. This message has been referred to in Chilappathikaram and also in Thiruvilayadal Puranam.⁶

The Wondrous Deeds of the Pandyas

The copper plate inscriptions speak of some wondrous deeds beyond human efforts, successfully accomplished by the Pandyas. They are,

- A Pandya king installed the emblem of the Pandya's 'fish' on the peak of the Himalaya.
- A Pandya king got the holy water from four different oceans in a single day and performed a holy bath (abishegam) to Lord Siva
- A Pandya King got the Mahabharatha composed in Tamil language.
- A Pandya King had instituted the Tamil Sangam at Madurai and undertaken the research work on Tamil literature with a galaxy of Tamil poets.
- A Pandya King celebrated the 'IndhiraVizha' to get the people relieved of the acute famine.⁷ This message has been referred in the Chinnamanur inscription as 'adumpasinoynaadakatri' which means "got the country relieved from the acute famine".
- The Pandyas were well-versed in Tamil language. It is evidenced by the Chinnamannur inscription. It is also said that one of the Pandyas paid four crores of gold coins and well learned a gross of Tamil literature.
- According to the copper plate inscription refers to the same point mentioned above as "porkunruayiramveeyum".
- One of the Pandya kings hoisted the flag of Indiran and thus celebrated the "IndhiraVizha". It has been referred to by the line of an inscription 'amponchiththiramuyariyum', meaning "hosting the flag painted with beautiful figure".

Dr. Krishnasamilyengar has given this explanation for the line 'amponchiththiramuyariyum'. And he says that a special celebration for Indiran was performed in North India and South India. The celebration was usually inaugurated with the hoisting Indiran flag.⁸

The Miracle of Parakraman's Daily Flight to Varanasi

There is a traditional story about ParakramaPandiya (1422-1463 A.D) that he was a regular worshipper of Lord Viswanatha at Varanasi (the north-kasi). Daily he flew to Varanasi at 4 a.m., worshipped Lord Viswanatha and came back to his fort at Tenkasi before the day dawn. The miracle behind this event was that he kept a KamagaKuligai (gold capsule) in his mouth, by which he could fly unsightable to anybody.⁹

CONCLUSION

Tenkasi was the home of the Pandiya chiefs of TenpandiSeemai and later, they were under the Madurai Nayaks.¹⁰ The Pandyas were the most outstanding; and the southernmost part of India had been the main seat of their power. Despite the advent of the Muslim rule in the South, the Pandyas continued to exercise limited authority in Tenpandi region as late as the 17th century.

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