



POIGAI INSCRIPTIONS AS A MIRROR OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF THONDAIMANDALAM DURING MEDIEVAL PERIOD

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ABSTRACT

There are a number of ways and means to comprehend the socio-economic structure of a society at a given period, especially the past. Inscriptions form an important part of such historical investigation. *Poigai* inscriptions, six of them, found at the Arulalaperumal temple, constitute an important archaeological evidence for Thondaimandalam during the medieval period. They detail various taxes and cess imposed and revenue collected until the end of last Chola ruler. In addition, donations made to temples, merchant activities, and functioning of local governments were also mentioned. Such details help paint a clearer picture of the social structure, the dynamics of the economy, and as to how they formed the society during the said period.

KEYWORDS :

An appraisal of the socio-economic gleanings of *Poigai* inscriptions of Vellore taluk and district *Poigai* is a place as village panchayat forming part of Vellore taluk and district. It is 12 km west of Vellore town located en-route Vellore-Virinjipuram motorable road. Although a village, this place is said to have retained its fame as an important smaller division during ancient and mediaeval periods. There is an ancient Temple dedicated to Perumal called Arulalaperumal or Chitramelimalai-Mandala-Vinnagar. And, at this Temple there existed 6 inscriptions of Rajaraja III*1, which reveal factors much pertinent to the socio-economic conditions of the contemporary society. In fact, those details formed the basis of this article.

Etymologically, the word *Poigai* in Tamil means a pond or a place where a pond is existing naturally. This place during Sangam age could have maintained the natural environ of lakes and ponds forming a fertile area. During medieval times, particularly Pallava period, it was said to have been part of Thondaimandalam. When the later Cholas of Vijayalaya line ruled the region, especially of Rajaraja regime, it came to be called as Jayankonda Cholamandalam. Therefore, until the end of the regime of last ruler of Chola dynasty in Thondaimandalam, it was referred as so.

Of the available epigraphical record, 2 inscriptions*2 with Grantha and Tamil characters issued in the 22nd year of the King Tribhuvana Chakravartin Rajarajadeva III in saka 116 (CE equivalent 1238) records the gift of the village of Kumaramangalam and two others, by a Kerala merchant Adi Rama, which he bought from Sengeni Vi rāsāniAmmayappanAlagiya Sō I anEdiriliSambuvarayan . These taxes and cess were enumerated.

Similarly, other two epigraphs*3 also of same nature issued in the twenty-fourth year of the same king (CE 1230-40) also records another village viz., Puttur. But it is quite interesting to get in the details of village revenue through various forms of taxes and cess as listed in detail which are collected under 2 major forms as Nellayam and Kā sāyam. Of the tax terms mentioned in the inscriptions Pādikaval, Cilvari, Eduthuthukotti, Arimukkai, etc., constitute Nellaya type of revenue while KarthikaiArisi, KarthikaiKasu, Karthikaipacchai, Velippayiru, Nirmilakkāsu, Thariyirai, Kadaiyirai, Kalakatappathar, Thattārappāṭṭam, Āsuvakkadamai, Sekkukadamai, Ēriminkāsu, Inavari, Pattollakkāsu, etc., form the cash type of revenue collection.

Another record*4 of the temple and same ruler said to duplicate the earlier. Yet another epigraph*5 of King Rajaraja III issued in age twenty-eighth year records the gift of the village of Attiyur, bought from the same Sambhuvaraya mentioned in the earlier inscriptions and endowed by the same Donor. Of the cited epigraphical records 2 referring to the gift of Kumaramangalam village*6 by a Kerala merchant Adi Rama attract much attention of recalling the contacts and relationship of the Kerala merchant with this portion of land far

away from his hometown. Moreover, his business activity closely associated with the society of this surroundings could have motivated merchants like him to generously donate through endowments.

On getting into the details of other inscriptions it becomes obvious to trace the type of taxes or cess prevailed at this place during medieval period. In this context, it becomes appropriate and essential to explain each type of revenue which the village administrator was collecting from the people.

Nellaya type of taxes: This kind of taxes are collected from the respective category as kind (produces) and the details of them are furnished with relevance.

PADIKKAVAL:

This is the tax collected from the village in lieu of policing facility rendered to the village. In fact, it is adequate payment for providing such services. This is very well explained by A. Appadorai in his work, **Economic Conditions in Southern India.*7**

CITVARI:

This is also a kind of tax collected from the society and the same is narrated in published research work, the revenue system under the Cholas*8. Eduthuthukotti and Arimukkai are the other forms of taxes also collected in kind from the villagers.

KĀŚĀYA TYPE OF TAXES:

KarthikaiArisi: This is the tax collected in cash for the maintenance of the temples and brahmans. Similarly, other terms such as Karthikaipacchai and KarthikaiKasu could be of relative contest. Velippayiru is another tax term referred, could be levied additionally. Nirmilakkāsu is a text meant for the maintenance of irrigation.*9

Tariyirai: This is also a kind of tax to be paid as cash by the weavers as professional tax. *10 **Kadaiyirai** is yet another type of professional tax to be paid by merchants. *11 **Thattārappāṭṭam** is also professional tax collected from goldsmith associated to their profession.*12

Apart from them there are also other tax terms such as Antarajam, Ajvikas, and tax on clothes, oil mills and washer man.

On delving into the details of the list enumerated, it becomes clear that *Poigai* as a small geographical division of Poygainadu in Thondaimandalam later termed as JayankondaCholamandalam could have retained that much natural wealth and fed to the requirements of people belonging to different communities engaged with various professions.

The tax terms reveal the existed communities of the society like the

brahmans, merchants, weavers, goldsmiths, besides other communities. It is an indication of how everyone contributed for the welfare of the society by remitting taxes and cess to the local government. From this, it becomes clear of the complexity of the society of the medieval times and it continues its legacy to the present age.

Moreover, the richness and fertile nature of the area could have been the strong reason for the political administrators of that period to levy such taxes and cess upon the society.

The agrarian society of the place constituted the main source of income for carrying out welfare activities in their locality. As a result of such agrarian based economic production and transaction merchants not only from the neighbouring areas, but also from distant and far off state like Kerala were attracted. They made an endowment of a village to Arulalaperumal temple of this place which is well attested by the inscription of the same temple. So, Poigai currently a village panchayat, with its riches and natural wealth could have been a prosperous settlement comprising people of different caste, strata, professions and it rendered yeoman services for the prosperity and progress of the society and central administration.

CONCLUSION

Thus, Poigai was an important village in the administrative set up in the medieval times. There are plenty of evidence to show its prominence in administrative set up and trade contact but it failed to flourish as a big trade center or town or city but remains a village till date. The only popular trade continues in that village is weekly market for cattle. It is one of the popular cattle markets in the northern districts. Its historic significance has faded into dark.

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