

I: PALLAVA INSCRIPTION

Dr. A. RAVISANKAR, Ph.D.,

In the latter half of the 6th century, a new dynasty called the Pallavas came to power in South India. The moment we state important South Indian kingdoms, names of great dynasties like the Cholas, Cheras, Pandyas and later the Vijayanagara Empire and Chalukyas are discussed.

When it comes to power tussle and power politics, South Indian history has always been a great example for this as three to four kingdoms have always waged war with each other to establish their power and rule the zone.

There are many theories about the origin of the Pallavas. Many historians and researchers have mentioned that the name Pallava was a disambiguation of Pahlava who were of Scythian origin. Many others have sought to connect them with Jaffna, identified with the island of Manipallavam mentioned in the Manimekalai.

Also, another view is that Pallava is a Sanskrit word meaning tender shoots and leaves of a plant. The northern parts of Tamil Nadu and southern parts of Andhra Pradesh were under the rule and control of the Pallavas. Their capital was Kanchi.

By the beginning of the seventh century AD, there were three major states which were seen emerging in southern India and these were: the Pallavas along with the Chalukyas of Badami and the Pāṇṭiyarkaḷ of Madurai.

Their kingdom, referred to as Tondaimandalam, stretched from southern Andhra Pradesh to northern Tamil Nadu - the fertile plains between the river basins of the Penna and Ponnaiyar rivers. Kanchipuram/Kāñcipuram was the capital of their empire and the port city of Mahabalipuram, the source of all their wealth.

The founder of the Pallava dynasty was Simha Vishnu who was said to be a very efficient and strong ruler. After the death of Simha Vishnu, Mahendravarman, his son succeeded him, and he was also believed to be a very efficient ruler and extremely learned.

The famous cave temple at Mahabalipuram was constructed based on his ideas. The news about the upcoming and prosperous dynasty spread all around and the famous Chalukya Pulakesi-II came to know about the richness and abundance of the kingdom. He attacked the kingdom and successfully defeated Mahendravarman.

The Pallavas were defeated only because their leader Mahendravarman died during the battle. His son, Narasimhavarman ascended the throne after him. It is said that Narasimhavarman vowed to take revenge for his father's death. He is believed to be physically well-built and having great intelligence. With planning, plotting and tactics, he almost destroyed the Chalukya Pulakesi kingdom.

He got a number of temples constructed in the capital Kanchi. It was in 740 AD, that the Pallava supremacy completely ended in South India when the Chalukyas overran the Pallavas in the revived conflict.

Capital Town

The town of Kanchipuram was the capital of the Pallavas. Kanchi is best known for history, culture, art and architecture.

In Sanskrit there is a saying which glorifies this place, 'Nagareshu Kanchi/Nākarēṣu kāñci', meaning the first among cities. The earliest reference to the city is in the Mahabhashya of Pathanchali of the 2nd century BCE. Later Tamil works of the 2nd century CE like Manimekala and Perumbhanatrupadai talk about the town as it was during that time.

Chinese Buddhist scholar Hieun Tsang travelled here in the 6th century CE and recorded his account about the town, while Marco Polo noted his views during his visit in the 12th century CE.

Bodhidharma/Pōtitarmar, said to be the son of a Pallava king and founder of Chan Buddhism travelled to Canton in China around 520 CE. The Saivite poet Appar of the 7th century CE and a contemporary of Mahendravarman described the city as a storehouse of immeasurable knowledge and learning.

Major Inscriptions of the Pallavas

Inscriptions are the major source of information in history. Inscriptions are writings or texts carved on solid objects such as pillars, walls, temples, forts, caves, palaces and stone. It is known as epigraphic information as they provide authentic information about various dynasties and their contributions.

Pallava Inscriptions:

1. Pillars
2. Temple walls
3. Written books

Languages used and where they were found:

Languages used were mainly Prakrit, Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu.

All early Pallava inscriptions were either in Sanskrit or Prakrit as these were considered the official languages of the dynasty. Some official scripts of Pallavas/Pallavarkaḷ were in Grantham/Kirantam.

Pallava inscriptions in Prakrit were also found in Palnad taluk of Guntur district, which speaks about King Simhavarman. This inscription is also an evidence to show that they adopted Tamil later.

Subsequently, Tamil became the main language to be used by the Pallavas/Pallavarkaḷ in their inscriptions. This language was first adopted by Mahendravarman I himself in a few records

of his and from the time of Paramesvaravarman I, the records were inscribed mostly in Sanskrit and the rest in Tamil.

Tamil works of the 2nd century CE like Manimekalai and Perumbhanatrupadai talk about the town, Kanchipuram/Kāñcipuram as it was during that time.

Major inferences from their inscriptions

1. Ancestors:

The history of the Pallavas/Pallavarkaḷ are recorded in Sanskrit and can be seen at Amaravati in Andhra. From the inscriptions, the ancestral lineage of Pallavas/Pallavarkaḷ remain mystical. It talks about a child of a union between the apsara Madani and the brahman warrior Ashwathaman, descendent of sage Bharadvaja, the son of Brahma.

There is only a single record of Mahedravarman III/Makēntiravarmaṅ, which is found on a slab set up in a street at Kanchipuram/Kāñcipuram. The whole previous Pallava history concluding with the coronation of Prince Nandivarman is depicted in sculptures elaborately carved on the walls of the verandah around the Garbhagriha of the Vaikunthaperumal temple at Kanchipuram/Kāñcipuram.

2. Wars fought:

Narasimhavarman/Naracim'mavarmaṅ I met the Chalukyas and defeated them in three separate encounters in Pariyala, Suramana and Manimangala, all close to the Pallava capital Kanchi, forcing them to retreat.

In 642 CE, a Pallava force under Paranjothi was sent by Narasimhavarman to capture Vatapi, the capital of the Chalukyas. Pulakesi-II met the Pallavas on the outskirts of his capital and is said to have lost his life in the ensuing battle.

The Pallavas achieved a decisive victory over Pulakeshin II and took the capital. Narasimhavarman I constructed a Mallikarjuna Temple at Vatapi to commemorate his victory. He also adopted the title “Vatapi-kondan” or “taker of Vatapi.

He carved an inscription recording his victory on the walls of the Teggina-Irappa temple in Vatapi. Paranjothi brought numerous items of war booty to the Pallava kingdom from Vatapi, including a famous icon of Lord Ganesha (Ganapathi) known as Vatapi Ganapathi, which he enshrined in his hometown.

3. Victory records:

The Pallava victory of Narasimhavarman is found on an inscription at the Mallikarjuna temple at Vatapi/Vātāpi, which corresponds to 642-43 AD. It was probably engraved after the capture and victory over Chalukyas

4. Religious beliefs:

In the Udayendiram plate of Nandivarman II, Simhaviṣṇu is said to have been a devout worshipper of Viṣṇu, and this is noteworthy especially since his son Mahendravarman I, who followed Jainism earlier, later converted to Śaivism through the influence of Saint Appar.

Conclusion

The Pallavas were a prominent and dominating South Indian kingdom, which has heavily influenced culture in South India with some unparalleled contributions.

The Pallava inscriptions provide to us credible information about various dynasties and their valuable contributions, which help us analyze in great depth about the contemporary social, cultural, economic and political set-up during the Pallava period in South India. These inscriptions provide a detailed insight about the Pallavas' ancestors, wars fought, victory records, religious beliefs and contributions of the kings. Therefore, without a doubt we can say that the Pallavas have gone down in history as one of the mightiest kingdoms of South India.

II: PANDYA INSCRIPTIONS

Pandyas are also mentioned in the inscriptions of Maurya emperor Asoka (3rd century BCE). In his inscriptions (2nd and 13th Major Rock Edict Asoka refers to the peoples of south India – the Chodas, Keralaputras, Pandyas and Satiyaputras. These polities, although not part of the Maurya empire, were on friendly terms with Asoka:

The conquest by dharma has been won here, on the borders, and even six hundred yojanas (5,400–9,600 km) away, where the Greek king Antiochos rules, beyond there where the four kings named Ptolemy, Antigonos, Magas and Alexander rule, likewise in the south among the Cholas, the Pandyas, and as far as Tamraparni river.

The earliest Pandya to be found in epigraph is Nedunjeliyan, figuring in the Tamil-Brahmi Mangulam inscription (near Madurai) assigned to 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE. The record documents a gift of rock-cut beds, to a Jain ascetic. It is assumed that the people found in the Mangulam inscription, Nedunjeliyan, Kadalān, and Izhanchadikān predates rulers such as Talaiyanganam Nedunjeliyan and Palyaga-salai Mudukudimi Peruvaludi.

Kharavela, the Kalinga king who ruled during c. 1st century BCE, in his Hathigumpha inscription, claims to have destroyed an old confederacy of Tamil countries ("the tamira–desa–sanghata") which had lasted 132 years, and to have acquired a large quantity of pearls from the Pandyas.

Silver punch-marked coins with the fish symbol of the Pandyas dating from around the same time have also been found

III: CHOLA INSCRIPTIONS

The Cholas are remembered as one of the longest ruling dynasties in South India. They are one of the famous kingdoms alongside of Pandyas/Pāṇṭiyarkaḷ and Cheras/Cērar. They contributed extensively to the field of art and architecture through the magnificent temples they built.

The reign of the Cholas was said to have begun in the 9th century when they defeated the Pallavas. They were divided as early Cholas and later Cholas - the ones who grew into power during the onset of the Sangam literature and later during the medieval period which saw the absolute development of the Chola power.

Development of the dynasty took place when kings like Aditya I and Parantaka I ruled. Kings like Rajaraja Chola and Rajendra Chola further expanded the kingdom into the Tamil region. Later Kulothunga Chola/Kulōttuṅka Coḷar took over Kalinga/Kaliṅkā to establish a strong rule. This magnificence lasted until the arrival of the Pandyas/Pāṇṭiyarkaḷ in the early 13th century.

The Cholas, Cheras, Pandyas and many older dynasties that ruled in the past were adept at many skills. Many of their great kings were able to make sure their respective empires were sustained throughout their lifetimes and also kept enemies at bay.

Ironically, we find some herculean tasks that they managed to perform without advanced technology, while we have all the resources today to easily accomplish our tasks. Among those tasks at which these respective empires were adept in, was making sure that their lifestyles, monuments and achievements remain preserved for many centuries. Their temple inscriptions contain an incredible amount of detail about their history, administration and socio-economic structure.

Inscriptions

Most of their inscriptions are written in Tamil, some are in Sanskrit and others in Grantha. The inscriptions are readable and their script is decipherable even centuries later, which could only be possible if the languages were passed down from centuries or, if the language and every aspect required to learn the language was also inscribed on walls or stones of a temple. The latter seems to be the more likely the case.

6. Major Inference from their inscriptions

1. Contributions

Uttaramerur inscriptions speak about Parantaka I and his victory over Madurai. They also speak about gifts of land made by two individuals, one from a temple musician and the other from a trader.

Another inscription of Rajakesari (Sundara Chola or Rajaraja I) throws light on the gift made by Nakkam Paavai alias Vallanaipaka Thalaikkoli, who considered herself as the daughter of the presiding deity of the temple. A piece of land was purchased out of the 7 kalanju of gold she had gifted and the produce was used to light a day-lamp in the temple.

‘*Thalaikkoli*’ was the highest distinction conferred on highly skilled temple dancers. It is equally interesting to note that three dancers of this temple were taken into the fold of the famous Thalichcheri Pendukal settled at the residential quarters of Rajarajisvaram at Thanjavur during the rule of the great king Rajaraja I. A fragmentary inscription of 9th century CE and another one, in which the name of the king is lost, record endowments made for lighting of a lamp at the temple.

The Thiruvotriyur temple inscriptions refer to an endowment given by Maran Parameswaran. On his return from Andhra Pradesh after winning a battle against a Chalukya king, capturing Seetpuli and Nellore, he donated a perpetually burning lamp and lands to the Adigramam temple. The commander-in-chief was awarded the title 'Sembian Chola Varaiyan' by the Chola King.

In the inscriptions of Rajaraja Chola in the Big Temple, it has been stated that one of the recipients of the 48 cows as endowment in return for supply of ghee for lighting lamps in the temple, is named as "Rajaraja Valanattu Poyyil Kutrathu Sirukulathur Puliyan Chootri."

The inscriptions in the Sankaranathar temple belong to the same Chola period. An officer by name Madhuranthaka Pallavarayan donated 428 Sri Lankan coins as loan to the Sirukulathur Sabaiyar. In return, the villagers had to maintain the irrigation tank of the village every year.

2. Wars fought

Attacks on south Kerala regions are mentioned in the inscriptions discovered from the temples at Cholapuram, Kanyakumari, Darsanam Koppu, Thirunanthikarai and Sucheendram. The Thirallaisthanam inscription reveals the friendship between Aditya I and Sthanuravi.

Rajendra Chola's (AD 1012-1044) Thiruvallangad inscription has mentioned about the Chola attack on Vizhinjam. The Cholapuram inscription is about the retreat of Kulothunga Cholan to Kottattu.

3. Divisions

Siva temple at Visalur village near Keeranur in Kulathur taluk was an early Chola edifice, attributed to the period of Parantaka I.

Some inscriptions throw light on the Chola administration.

The Chola Empire was divided into Mandalams (zones) and Valanadus (a group of villages). Visalur was situated in the Jayasingakulakala Valanadu in Mel Sengilinadu as learnt through the inscription of Raja Raja I in the year 997 AD. This inscription describes the large extent of land gifted by villagers, its measurement, boundaries, quantum of paddy to be used in each ritual and puja and festivals to be celebrated.

4. Brihadeshwara Temple

It is a temple dedicated to lord Shiva and is a huge temple. According to Dr. R. Nagaswamy, former Director of Tamil Nadu Archaeology Department, it is the only temple in India where the king specifically talks in an inscription that he built the temple only with stones and that the king uses the word "katrali"— kal and thali in Tamil mean a temple built of stone.

This epic inscription, running into 107 paragraphs, describes how Rajaraja Chola, seated in the royal bathing hall on the eastern side of his palace, ordered that it be inscribed on the base of the temple's Vimana, how he followed through with his temple plan, a list of the gifts that he, his sister ("em akkan") Kundavai, his queens and others gave the temple, and so on.

The inscriptions in the temple encompass all activities of Rajaraja Chola's kingdom – the administrative machinery, economic transactions, survey of lands, irrigation system, taxation, accounting, organisation of a huge army, rituals, music, dance, the king's fondness for Tamil and Sanskrit literature, and so on. They also show that he had defined and classified the duties, responsibilities, qualifications and service tenure of each functionary of the temple.

The inscriptions provide interesting information on drummers, tailors, physicians, surgeons, carriers of flags and parasols during festivals, torch-bearers, cleaners and sweepers. The temple had singers of Tamil hymns (called “Devaram”) and Sanskrit hymns, and a large number of vocal and instrumental musicians.

It had on its rolls 400 accomplished danseuses called “*talippendir*” to perform dances during daily temple rituals and in festival processions. Source Nagaswamy.R. Bṛhadiśvara Temple: Form and Meaning, Aryan Books International, India 2010 -accessed on 22/12/2019

5. Thiruchendurai Temple

This temple is situated on the Trichy-Karur highway. It was built by Poodhi Aditha Pidari, queen of Arinchaya Chola.

One inscription shows the vows taken by two bodyguards of a local feudal ruler, Mikaman. It was considered a sin to live after the death of their benefactor. So, once they take up the job of bodyguard they used to take vows in front of the God declaring that they will not live after the demise of their Lord.

The second Inscription engraved talks about the royal order of the king remitting certain taxes on the lands of both Siva and Vishnu Temples of the Cholamandalam. These were deciphered by R. Kalaikkovan, Director of Dr. M. Rajamanikkanar Centre for Historical Research.

Conclusion

We chose to research on the Cholas because of their lifestyles, achievements and due to the fact that they were able to hold their dominions for 400 years amongst rival kings such as the Pandyas, who had equal amounts of prestige and power. They have left behind temples which hold a myriad of inscriptions and give great insights into our culture and heritage, enabling us to observe our strong cultural roots in which many meaningful practices, thoughts and ideas are present.

The inscriptions talk about their victories and losses and list the achievements of each individual king, which may be lengthy or short, in parts of inscriptions known as that king's *meikirthi*.

IV: ESTAMPAGE: EPIGRAPHICAL INSTITUTIONS

There are various institutions offered a Epigraphical courses in the Universities and Colleges, mostly it was integrated with the Archaeological Course. Example: Delhi University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Hyderabad University. Mangalore University, Madras

University, Bharathidasan University, Manomaniyan Sundaranar University, Madurai Kamaraj University.

The courses are part of curriculum and widely known as the Epigraphical institutions.
