

Val II, Issue:VIII, Sept 2012

ISSN : 2230-7850

Indian Streams Research Journal



**Monthly Multidisciplinary
Research Journal**



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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2230-7850

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Archaeological Excavation Of Trangampadi (TRANQUEBAR) At Danish Fort

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Abstract:

The History of Tranquebar could be traced back to the beginning of the Christian Era. Ancient Sangam classics like the Purananuru, Natrinai and Agananooru refer to Poraiyar. The famous poet kalladanar praises the chieftain of Poraiyar in Puram 391. Poraiyar is referred to as a port town is Munturai. It is likely that the sea with was originally skirting Poraiyar has receded subsequent to the second century A.D by about a mile. Poraiyar continued to play important role in the history of Tranquebar till 19th century.

TARANGAMBADI MEANS

The Earliest reference to Tarangambadi occurs in a 14th century inscription, mentioning the place as Sadanganpadi. The inscription also refers to a merchants guild know as Pathinen Visha Ayattar (traders of 18 countries) and also a family of Sailers called Karaiar, residing at Tarangambadi. It was thus already a commercial port attracting traders from different countries including overseas. Situated on the port has give access to inland trade from early times.

Tarangampadi is situated 15 kms. South of the celebrated ancient port Kaveripoompattinam, (Pumpuhar) referred to as Kaberis Emperion in the works of classical geographers, like Ptolemy. Kaveripoompattinam attracted traders from all parts of the world, specially from the roman empire. The river Poraiyar locally called Uppanaru, has a confluence with the bay of Bengal on the southern side of the fort.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF TRANQUEBAR

This port city is in existence since the Sangam period with varying degrees of importance. The Sangam works like Purananuru (391) Agananooru (100) and Natrinai (131) refer to this city as Poraiyaru, the Sangam poet Kalladanar praised the elder (Kilan) of Poraiyaru, who posed with the chariot. Agananooru refers to "Pariyudai Narrerp Periyen Viriyanarp Punnaiyan Kaavar Purandai Munvurai". The term Purandai (Poraiyaru) would have exists as a port town. The word Munturai always stands for a port that is situated on the estuaries. The suffixes that are found in association with celebrated port towns like Virai Munturai (Arikamedu) Puhar. Munturai (Kaveripoom – Pattinam) and Karachi Munturai (Korkai) clearly vindicate this point.

Another Sangam Poem Natrinai (131) refers to this place as Poraiyaru. The relevant lines, say 'Narrerp Periyen, Kal Kamal Poraiyaru Anna'. Beyond the reference cited above nothing could be

Please cite this Article as : M. NILAVENDAN , Archaeological Excavation Of Trangampadi (tranquebar) At Danish Fort : Indian Streams Research Journal (Sept. ; 2012)



discerned from Sangam literature. Much of the data relating to this place emerges from the medieval period. The Earliest standing monument that stands on the seashore of this place is the Siva temple called Masilamaninathar temple, then called Mannivannesvaram. It carries an inscription datable to the Pandya King, Maravarman Kulasekaran. The 1305 AD inscription states this place as Sandankanpadi Alias Kulasekaranpattinam (S11 4:399). It is clear from this inscription that this place is known as Sandankanpadi and it is renamed as Kulasekaranpattinam during the period of the Pandya king. Maravarman Kulasekaran the present name Trangampadi would be the corrupt form of Sadanganpadi.

Further this inscription refers to the trade guild Patinervisayattar (traders of 18 countries) and Kariyar (Probably sailors). During this period, particularly under the Pandya's the trade guild Patinervisayattar took an active part in international trade and also played a great role in the maintenance of the port. Another inscription also refers to the merchants as settis (S11 4: 400). An inscriptions engraved during the 24th regnal year of the Pandya king, Maravarman Vira Pandya refers to the merchants and the soldiers who were stationed at the port for the protection merchants. The inscription datable to Sundera Pandya found in the Amirtakateswarar temple at Tirukadaiyur in Mayavaram Taluk of Nagapattinam district also refers to this port as Kulasekarapattinam.

The inscription engraved on a loose slab during the period of the Nayak king, Achchutappa Nayak found at Masilamaninathar temple refers to this place again as Sadankanpadi. It also refers to the soldiers who were stationed at this place in the protection of the merchants. This indicates that this place continued as a port town till the Nayak period. However, whether the fort existed immediately prior the Danish is not definitely known. The term Kottai Senai Kaikolar found in the Nayak inscription stands for the soldiers who were placed to protect the fort as the name of the fort is not specifically mentioned, it is inferred that this Kaikolar would have protected the fort that existed at Tarangampadi.

An Inscription datable to 1606 A.D found in the Varadarajaperumal temple dedicated to god Vishnu mentions that his temple was reconstructed by one Vikram Vaidya Chettiyar. He made certain provisions for the daily worship at this temple. He collected the taxes from fisherman alias Ariya Nattar and donated the same to this temple. The local fishermen still worship this temple as Matsyavatara, one of the ten incarnations of Vishnu. Every year festivals are being conducted in this temple. Coins of Chinese origin were also encountered at this place. The inscription found at Varadharajaperumal temple mentions a term called sampan Sauvanthiram. Scholars feel that sampan is nothing but a corrupt form of san-pan, which stands for a Chinese ship. There are references about Sampokku which also has a close resemblance to sampan. Further quite a number of Chinese celadon wares collected at this place clearly suggest that this port would have had contact with china.

Two missionaries on under the leadership of Bartholomeus Zeigenbalg and another under Fr. Schwartz deserve special mention. Zeigenbalg landed at Tarangampadi on 9th July 1706 during the reign of Frederick IV, the king of Denmark and Norway.

The First printing press in Tamil established at Tarangampadi and the new testament translated into Tamil by Zeigenbalg was printed here. He built the new Jerusalem church at Tarangampadi in October 1718, which is located on the Northern side of the fort. Fr. Schwartz, the celebrated mentor of Maratha king Serfoji II of Thanjavur, arrived at Tarangampadi in 1750 A.D and served there for eleven years before moving over to Thanjavur. Foreign traders slowly made their presence at this port during the reign of the Nayaks of Thanjavur, they were from England, France, Holland and Denmark.

The king of Denmark sent two ships to India under the leadership of Ove Gedde. Before coming to India, he stayed at Sri Lanka, with the help of Roeland crape of Holland; he made contact with the Thanjavur Nayak ruler Rangunatha Nayak. Both Ove Gedde and Rangunatha Nayak made an agreement on 19th November, 1620. This agreement was written on a golden leaf in which Rangunatha Nayak affixed his signature in Telugu script. This agreement presently is housed in the royal archives Copenhagen. According to the agreement, a part of Trangampadi was given to the Danish trader and also a provision was made for collecting taxes.

This agreement was made in line with the Nagapattinam agreement, which was given to the Portuguese during that time. Tarangampadi became a centre for Danish traders for nearly 225 year. Nearly 51 Danish governors were posted to Tarangampadi, which itself indicates the importance it attained during their rule. Tarangampadi was under the control of the Danish east India company Administrators from 1620 to 1845 A.D. the ships of demark used to take six months to reach Tarangampadi. To mark the momentous occasion of the arrival of a ship, they issued a coin with name of the ship on the coin like David, elephant, etc.,

EXCAVATION OF TARANGAMPADI DANISH FORT

The Fort was first built in 1620 AD. Though most parts of the fort have been reconstructed several times, fortunately we could recall the original plan and other additional structures based on the plans made from time to time, which are available.

Tarangampadi fort consisted of two large structures. They were the rampart wall and the main buildings. The rampart wall was a fairly large four-sided structure with bastions at each cardinal point. Along the three inner sides of the fort wall, a single-storied building was constructed. These rooms were used for barracks, warehouse, kitchen and jail. Now the rooms on the southern side are in good condition but the rooms on the western and northern side have been completely damaged. On the eastern side of the fort, there was a two-storied building facing the sea. It was the main building of the fort. The vaulted lower storey served as magazines and a warehouse while the vaulted upper storey contained the church and the lodgings of the governor, the senior merchant and the chaplain. The fort was surrounded by a moat and access to the fort was over a drawbridge. This moat has completely disappeared. The sea on the eastern side and the river on the southern side protected it.

The information gathered from different sources clearly suggests that this place continued in existence for a long period of time. The fort built in 1620 AD also went into different stages of construction and subsequent destruction. The exposed rampart wall could not give any idea on the nature of construction and subsequent modification. The non-availability of the factual data hindered in planning the preservation of the monument. So it was planned to take up a small preliminary excavation near the fortification wall to identify the different phases of the construction.

During 1620 A.D. Tanjore province was under the rule of the mighty king Vijaya Raganatha Nayak on 5th May 1620 AD. He granted permission to the king of Denmark, Christina IV to set up their trading centre at Tranquebar based on the agreement that the Danish would pay Rs. 3111 per month as rent. The agreement document is in the form of a small sheet made of gold in which Vijaya Raganatha Nayak has signed his name in Telugu. This document is now preserved in the international archives at Copenhagen, Denmark.

Around the same period during 1620 AD. Roland Crape, a Danish navy captain in the name of the Danish king bought Tranquebar and the surrounding area from the Tanjore king. When the Danes built the majestic Dansborg fort and the stony wall that surrounded it and there by made Tranquebar a prime trading spot and a well-known place in the pages of history. This Dansborg fort has the unique distinction of having attracted the sea voyagers passing through the east coast, into Tranquebar.

Tranquebar came into the complete control of Danish rulers during 1777 AD later, when the English established their rule in India, they (the English) bought Tranquebar from the Danish for Rs. 12.5 lakh during 1845 AD when India attained independence during 1947, and the Dansborg fort came under the control of the union government.

SIGNIFICANCE OF TRANKAMBADI

Masillamani Nathar Temple this temple finds frequent references in hymns like Devaram, the presiding deity of this temple is referred to as 'Mani' Varneeswarar Masilla Nathar' in Devaram, Thirunavukkarasar a famous Saiva saint of 6th century describes Mailla Natha swami as 'Alappur Ammanai' in a hymn named 'Oorthogai Pasuram'.

This temple is the oldest monument to survive in Tranquebar. This was built by a king named Maravarman Kulasekara Pandyan in 1305 AD. This temple originally had 3 Mandapams out of which 2 have been completely swallowed by sea. The temple contained rich pieces of architectural works and Epigraphs which have fallen prey to the ferocious tides. What remains today is the innermost Mandapam a tottering structure in a precarious condition.

THE ZION CHRISTIANS

This elegant church was built by the Danish rulers during 1701 AD. The missionaries were engaged in public service and religious service. The Church celebrated its 300th anniversary in 2001.

THE CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS

The Roman Catholic Christians landed at Tranquebar during the beginning of the 17th century. With the permission of Danes, they built churches and dedicated themselves to public service, educational and medical service and propagated Christianity.

CONCLUSION

Tranquebar holds a pride of place in Indian history for the harmonious coexistence of Hindus, Muslims and Christians for centuries together. This great town served as district head quarters during the inceptive period of English rule later the Headquarters was shifted to Tanjore. In independent India, Tranquebar became a Taluk and continues so in the Neully formed Nagapattinam District. Since 1978, this fort has been under the maintenance of Tamilnadu Archaeological Department, now this fort houses an Archaeological Museum. A large number of tourists visit this fort everyday.

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