

# K.K.PILLAY'S INTERPRETATION ON THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF NANCHILNAD - A STUDY

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Dr. K.K. Pillay also interpreted the important political activities of various rulers in his book "*The Early History of Nanchilnad*" in a detailed manner. The political history of Nanchilnad may be traced from the glorious Sangam epoch. However, the Sangam classics provide only scanty and scrappy evidences on political matters. Poets like **Agasthiyar** and grammarian like **Tholkappiyar** are said to have hailed from Nanchilnad.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, **Atankottasan** a reputed grammarian also had his birth at Atankodu, a village on the western part of Nanchilnad. The name Atankottasan is found in the prefatory verse of **Tholkappiyam**. Thiruvalluvar, author of Thirukkural is said to be belonged to Thirunayanarkuruchi, a place situated in the Kalkulam taluk which has been proved by S.Padmanabhan, General Secretary, Kanyakumari Historical and cultural research centre on the basis of archaeological, epigraphic, literary and oral evidences.<sup>2</sup>

K.K.Pillay adds that great grammatical work was approved in the academy under the chairmanship of Atankottasan in the presence of Nilantarutiruvil Pandyan. The word *Asan* means an authority in literature, medicine, astrology, mantra, martial arts etc. Tholkappiyam, the first grammatical work in Tamil literature is said to have been composed in this region.<sup>3</sup> Today the name Nanchilnad denotes the region comprising Agasteeswaram and Thoivalai taluks of modern Kanyakumari District. But in ancient days it was a slightly bigger unit.

Valluvanadu was one of the divisions of Nanchilnad and it was ruled by a chieftain Nanchilvalluvan.<sup>4</sup> One of the inscriptions belonging to the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the great Chola King Raja Raja I found in the rockcut cave temple at Thirunandikarai records the gift of the

village of Muttom in Valluvanadu to the temple of Thirunandikarai and the name of the village has been altered to Mummudicholanallur.<sup>5</sup>

Oruchiraiperiyandar, one of the Sangam poets, who had sung a few verses in Purananuru says that Nanchilnad was ruled by a chieftain called Nanchil Porunan. However, his political activities and other achievements are not recorded in the classics. Boothapandy near Alagiapandi-puram in Nanchilnad was one of the important villages during the Sangam age. In the inscription, the name of the village is mentioned as Adiganur.

The Sangam classics make a mention of a Pandya king Ollaiyurthanta Boothapandyan, that is the king Boothapandyan conquered Olaiyur. It is interesting to observe that the village Boothapandy was named after the Pandya King. The King himself was a poet. Two of his verses are found in the Tamil anthologies, one in Purananuru and another in Ahananuru. The monarch's queen Perumkopendu was also a poetess. One of her verses is found in Purananuru.<sup>6</sup>

### **Nanchilnad under the early Pandyas**

The Pandya dynasty was one of the oldest ruling dynasties in the Tamil country. As the traditional founders and patrons of the Sangam, they were more prestigious than the Cholas and Cheras. It is said that Nediyan was the earliest Pandya King. Mudatirumaran was their ruler, after the destruction of Kapadapuram by sea erosion, shifted his capital to Madurai.<sup>7</sup> Among the early Pandyas, Aryapadaikadanta Nedunchelian and Talayalanganatu Cheruventra Pandyan Nedunchelian were famous rulers.

Traditionally the southern region had a very high antiquity. The Pandyas had ruled the area least from the Sangam age. Maduraikanchi informs that the land near Kumari was under the proud possession of the Pandyas. Goddess Kumari was worshipped as the family deity by the Pandya Kings.

**Periplus of the Erythrean Sea** (1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.) mentions Kumari as a harbour and the area formed part and parcel of the Pandya Kingdom. **Ptolemy** also mentions that the region was ruled by the Pandyas.<sup>8</sup> When the first Pandya empire was established by Kadungon (590-620

A.D.) after the Kalabhra interregnum, Nanchilnad could have been included in the Pandya's rule. Subsequent rulers also had control over this area. However, no early inscription of the Pandyas is available in the region.

### **Nanchilnad under the Cholas**

The Cholas of the Sangam age did not completely disintegrated and disappear from the pages of history, but were waiting for their turn to come up, and that came about in 850 A.D., when the Cholas rose to prominence under Vijayalaya (850-870 A.D.). His grandson Parantaka I (907-955 A.D.) brought this area under his control. His inscriptions are found at Suchindrum indicating his authority over this area. After him, the great Raja Raja I (985-1014 A.D.) made a thrust into this area. His inscriptions speak the conquest of this area. The capture of Vizhingam and Kudanadu confirmed the above fact.<sup>9</sup>

According to K.K. Pillay the Chola influence on the political history of Nanchilnad started in 910 A.D. Raja Raja I organized a military campaign and entered the wealthy land of Nanchilnad. In memory of his victory over Kottaru, the place was renamed as Mummudicholanallur.<sup>10</sup>

The first epigraphical mention of Kottaru is found in the record of Raja Raja I dated in the 18<sup>th</sup> regnal year (1003 A.D.) engraved on a pillar in the Kommandaiamman temple at Vadasery and then in the inscriptions of Sundara Cholapandya and Kulothunga I found in the Cholaraja koil.<sup>11</sup>

A Siva temple popularly known as Cholaraja koil near Kommandaiamman temple is situated on the western bank of the river *Palayaru*. The epigraphs indicate the increasing influence of the colonization of this area in the Chola period. During the period of Rajendra Chola the above temple was renovated and reconstructed in Chola style by one of his officials and the deity was renamed as *Rajendra-choleswarar*. This fact is attested by one of the inscriptions found in the temple. The *vimana* of the temple resembles that of the Brahadiswara temple at Tanjavur in a miniature form.

The creation of the Chola-Pandya viceroys in the reign of Rajendra I to govern the Pandya country probably brought Nanchilnad under the strict control of the viceroys. The Chola kings took special steps to strengthen their defences at Kottaru in Nanchilnad. Kottaru which thus became a military outpost for the Cholas in the south, had consequently become a permanent station.

Jatavarman Sundara Chola - Pandya (1018-1040 A.D.) could have controlled the area effectively since his inscriptions are found in Cholapuram and Suchindrum. There is not much information with regard to the control of this area by the other Chola - Pandya viceroys. During the time of Kulothunga I (1170-1200 A.D.) the Pandyas seem to have regained their power in this area. The inscriptions of Parantaka I in this region mention his achievement and donations to the Kanyabhagavathiyar temple.

### **Nanchilnad under the Later Pandyas**

After the death of Kulothunga I, the Pandyas progressed step by step and never reconciled themselves to the rule of the Cholas. The steady growth of Pandya power was paralysed by the outbreak of a civil war in Madurai, yet the Pandya power reached its zenith during 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The installation of Jatavarman Kulasekara I, on the Pandya throne by Kulothunga III marked the beginning of the new Pandyan imperialism.<sup>12</sup>

The region was subsequently in the hands of the Pandya kings. Their inscriptions are found in some places of Nanchilnad. Not much evidences for political activity can be collected from the inscriptions. However a few aspects have been gathered. Maravarman Sundarapandya (1216-1239 A.D.) inaugurated the second empire of the Pandyas which lasted till 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. He subdued the Cholas and assumed the title *Conadukondaruliadevar* and the Cholas were made to pay tribute to the Pandyas. The inscriptions speak of the large grants donated by these Pandya rulers for various religious activities such as the recitation of vedic hymns in the temples of this region.

The next ruler was Jatavarman Sundara Pandya (1261-1271) and his authority also extended from Nanchilnad in the south to Arcot in the north.<sup>13</sup> Jatavarman Virapandya had

captured the countries Ezham, Kongunadu and Cholanadu. His inscription at Suchindrum (1256 A.D.) mentions that he endowed 200 puthupon to God Suchindramudayanar under the request made by his queen Chokkathandal.

Maravarman Kulasekara was the last Pandya ruler. The following four princes co-operated with him in the administration of the empire, namely Jatavarman Sundara Pandya II, Maravarman Vikrama Pandya, Jatavarman Virapandya II and Jatavarman Sundarapandya III. They under took an expedition to Ezham. After him a civil war brokeout in the Pandyan Kingdom. In the beginning of 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. the area had gone into the hands of the Venadu rulers of the Chera line.

### **Nanchilnad under the Venadu Kings**

K.K. Pillay comments on the relationship between Venad kings with Nanchilnad in his celebrated work, "*The Early History of Nanchilnad*". Probably in this distressing period, the Venadu kings dominated the Nanchilnad region.<sup>14</sup> How they acquired the control is not clear from the sources. Kodaikeralavarma a Venadu king's rule seems to have started some time in 1145 A.D. since his inscriptions are sound in Suchindrum temple. Sri Vira Ravivarman was the successor of Kodaikeralavarman. His authority extended in this area also. Udayamarthandavarman was the next Venadu ruler of importance.

The 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries witnessed the rule of notable monarchs succeeding one another. Early in the 14<sup>th</sup> century A.D. the famous conqueror Ravivarman Kulasekara, who was ruling at Quilon under took a bold campaign in the eastern coast. K. K. Pillay observed that probably the area Nanchilnad was included in his rule.

### **Nanchilnad under the Vijayanagar Empire and the Nayaks of Madurai**

The Vijayanagar rule was established over the Pandya and Venadu regions in 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The Venadu kings ruled as subordinates to the Vijayanagar kings. During the reign of Bhutala Sri Viraudayamarthanda conflict arose between Venadu and the Vijayanagar kingdom, and Krishnadevaraya invaded the region in 1532 A.D. The epigraphical sources

clearly indicate the victory of Vijayanagar rulers over Nanchilnad. During the reign of Achutharaya there was an invasion made over Nanchilnad.<sup>15</sup>

After A.D. 1542 following the death of Achutharaya, the Nayaks of Madurai asserted their independence. However, the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D. the repeated attacks started in Nanchilnad by the Nayaks of Madurai. A regular invasion was undertaken by Thirumalai Nayak in A.D.1634. when it was ruled by the Venadu king Ravivarma. Thirumalai Nayak sent an army under Velayyan, but the invaders were repulsed with heavy losses. To avenge the defeat Thirumalai immediately collected a bigger army and sent it under his able Commander Ramappayyan. In 1697 Rani Mangammal also invaded Nanchilnad.

The task of defending the country against the Nayak forces fell on the gallant shoulders of Iravikutti Pillai, commander of the Venad forces. He vehemently attacked the invaders at Kaniyakulam in 1635 A.D. In this battle the Nayak forces cut off the head of Iravikutti Pillai and carried to Thirumalai Nayak. During his period the Nayak Kingdom extended from Madurai to Nanchilnad.

### **Nanchilnad under the Travancore Maharajas**

The modern era in the political history of Nanchilnad is said to have dawned with the epoch making reign of Balamarthandavarma (1729-1758 A.D.), one of the famous Travancore Maharajas. During his reign, the Dutch captured the area from Kottaru to Colachel. Then the Dutch army marchd towards Padmanabhapuram, the capital of Travancore. But Marthandavarma and Ramayyan, the Diwan of Travancore resisted the Dutch army on 31<sup>st</sup> July A.D. 1741 the "battle of Colachel" fought between the Dutch army and the Travancore forces.<sup>16</sup> A pillar commemorating the stiring event stands on the beach of Colachel. The "battle of Colachel" is very important in the history of Travancore in general and the erstwhile south Travancore is particular.

After the battle of Colachel, Marthandavarma took special steps to strengthen his defences at Udayagiri fort. The fort was reconstructed and used as their strong defensive structure. The army was also rearranged on European model by De-Lannoy, one of the 24 prisoners captured in the Colachel battle. The army was divided into regiments and battalions. K.K. Pillay observed that an arsenal was established at Udayagiri fort for the manufacture of heavy ammunitions. In A.D.1758. Ramavarma Karthigai Thirunal Maharaja came to the throne of Travancore. During his period the Zamarin of Calicut conquered Cochin and the Raja of Cochin sought the help of Ramavarma and entered into a treaty of friendship known as the "Treaty of Suchindrum", signed in 1761 A.D. During the reign of Gauri Lakshmi Bai (1811-1815), Col.Munro the Diwan of Travancore Kingdom issued a proclamation.<sup>17</sup> As a result of that, the Government had taken charge and control over important temples especially Suchindrum temple.

In 1818 A.D. another royal proclamation was enforced to ban political meetings in this region. The Travancore Maharajas encouraged agriculture also. The **Pechiparai dam** was constructed during the reign of **Srimoolam Thirunal** for the irrigational purposes of Nanchilnad.<sup>18</sup> According to K.K.Pillay the temple entry proclamation, the creation of transport department, the abolition of death benalty and the construction of concrete road between Kanyakumari and Trivandrum were the historical achievements of the Travancore Maharajas. One T.B. Hospital was built near Nagercoil by the efforts of Sri. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the Diwan of Travancore.

During the period of Travancore Maharajas, the criminal code was also very severe and delinquents were punished not only by imprisonments but by public flogging, mutilation of limbs etc. The highest punishment was a type of hanging. The criminal was fixed in a cover made of iron strips and the receptacle was attached to a tall tree with his head downward, so that crows and eagles were able to eat the human body in living condition. This peculiar type of

instrument of torture is even now preserved in the armoury hall of the Padmanabhapuram Palace.

In 1947 Travancore state was merged with Indian Union and a stable government was established. Subsequently in 1951 the merger of Cochin with Travancore was effected and the Kerala State was formed and Nanchilnad became a part and parcel of Kerala State. On linguistic grounds the people of Nanchilnad wanted to merge with the state of Madras. The State Linguistic Reorganisation Committee formed in 1956, considering the genuine demand of the people recommended the merger of Tamil speaking areas with the Madras State and the latter was renamed as Tamil Nadu in 1967.

To summarize, K.K.Pillay gave a vivid picture about the political developments and incidents that occurred in the erstwhile South Travancore in his celebrated work "**The Early History of Nanchilnad**". He gave an objective presentation in this regard.

## ENDNOTES

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