

OVER SEA TRADE RELATIONS OF THE LATER PANDYAS

**Dr.S.Kalai Arasu.,
M.A.,M.Phil.,B.L.,Ph.D.
Associate Professor of History.,
Arignar Anna College.,
Aralvaymozhi.629301
Kanyakumari District**

ABSTRACT

The merchant's guilds were very powerful organizations in medieval times in the Pandya region and elsewhere in other parts of India. Trade plays a significant and permanent role in economic history. Moreover, the traders of Tamil country had both the knowledge of navigation and land routes. They maintained close commercial contacts with outside countries like Egypt, Rome, the Middle East, the Far East and Southeast Asia. In medieval times, Ayyavole or Ainnurruvar, Nanadesis, Nagarattar, Disai Ayirattainurruvar, Manigramattar, Anjuvanam, Chitrameli Periyannattar and valanjiyar were some of the merchant guilds. There were different kinds of guilds viz., the agriculturist's guild, the craft guild, the artisan guild, the merchant's guild and the caste guild. Among these, the merchant's guild was the best organized and economic organization. It played a vital role in the multipurpose activities of trade and commerce. They were also concerned with the administration of many townships, particularly the urban centres, which were very near to the ports or the coastal areas. The functions of the merchant guild were not confined to economic matters alone. These guilds were involved in overseas trade from the sixth to fourteenth century A.D. Three famous overseas inscriptions of the ninth, eleventh and thirteenth centuries found in foreign countries suggest that the guilds sent their agents far abroad and established trading stations. They played a vital role in the multipurpose activities of trade and commerce. They also played a prominent role in matters concerning social, religious, administrative and judicial affairs of the country. They acted as trustees of both the rulers and ruled. They received endowments of money from the rulers. They built and maintained charity houses, temples and tanks for the welfare of the people. The overseas commerce which flourished under the Cholas was continued by the Pandyas. The foreign accounts of a galaxy of travelers had given an excellent peep into the commercial activities of the age.

KEY WORDS: Merchant's guilds – Overseas - Inscriptions - Organizations - Pandya region – Ainnurruvar – Nanadesis – Nagarattar - Disai Ayirattainurruvar – Manigramattar – Anjuvanam - Chitrameli Periyannattar – Valanjiyar – Cholas.

Introduction:

From the earliest days, India has been a trading country. Indian merchants carried out extensive trade with foreign countries. Because India was endowed with an abundance of raw materials and its natural products found appreciated markets in the Middle East, Far East and South East Asia. There were classes of people belonging to certain castes such as Paris, Veta, Sambar and Vaisyas who were mainly concerned with commerce. They were mighty and intelligent people who accumulated fabulous wealth through extensive maritime trade and made India a great exporting centre. India's natural wealth and extensive seaboard distinguished it from other Asiatic lands. In contrast with the Arabian peninsula on the West, the Malayan peninsula on the East, or the equally fertile empire of China, India has always maintained an active trade with foreign countries in spices, medicinal herbs, dyes, woods, etc Fabrics of silk and cotton, jewels and gems were the temptations, which attracted the foreign traders to India. Pliny calls India as 'Mother of

Gems'. The Romans loved precious stones and India was the only country at that time that could export all varieties of gems.

Growth of Trade

With the growth of the commercial enterprise, trade began to assume certain fixed forms and passed through many stages of development. In this process, production was earmarked for some definite markets. Markets arose as the centres of commerce and industry. In markets, trade became a permanent feature. Trade plays a significant and permanent role in economic history. Moreover, the traders of Tamil country had both the knowledge of navigation and land routes. They maintained close commercial contacts with outside countries like Egypt, Rome, the Middle East, the Far East and Southeast Asia. Favourable overseas trade was a still and important source of the country's wealth. The overseas commerce which flourished under the Cholas was continued by the Pandyas. The foreign accounts of a galaxy of travelers had given an excellent peep into the commercial activities of the age. In the second process trade with distant places was usually conducted by itinerant merchants. They met periodically at markets and fairs to dispose of their commodities, which gradually gave birth to merchant guilds. In this process, some traders collected commodities from the place of production and sold them to the local merchants for regular sale among the common masses. In medieval times, Ayyavole or Ainnurruvar, Nanadesis, Nagarattar, Disai Ayirattainurruvar, Manigramattar, Anjuvanam, Chitrameli Periyannattar and valanjayar were some of the merchant guilds. These guilds were involved in overseas trade from the sixth to fourteenth century A.D. Three famous overseas inscriptions of the ninth, eleventh and thirteenth centuries found in foreign countries suggest that the guilds sent their agents far abroad and established trading stations. They played a vital role in the multipurpose activities of trade and commerce. They also played a prominent role in matters concerning social, religious, administrative and judicial affairs of the country. They acted as trustees of both the rulers and ruled. They received endowments of money from the rulers. They built and maintained charity houses, temples and tanks for the welfare of the people.

Manigramam

One of the earliest inscriptional notices of the Manigramam guild traders appeared in the ninth or early tenth century at the port of Quilon on the Kerala coast. The contents of this inscription as well as many others referred to indicate that the Manigramam association was undoubtedly a merchant guild. The evidence that this corporation of merchants was functioning at this port, at that time needs to be viewed in its wider context as part of the larger pattern of overland and maritime commercial activity which included areas bordering the Arabian peninsula, part of North-West India, the East and West coasts of India, and many areas of North-East Asia and China. This wide-ranging trade was particularly important in medieval times. But for a long time, there were several interpretations of the term Manigramam. Another theory was that the Manigramam consisted of Christians who were reconverted to Hinduism by Manikkavasakar. Naccinarkiniyar takes it to be the name of a community (Kuluvinepyar). His mention of the Vanigramam, a variant of the Manigramam gives the possible explanation for the word. The Sthanu Ravi plates undoubtedly indicate a close connection between Manigramam and the Christian community. All other epigraphic evidence, discovered in other parts of the peninsula referred to it as an association of Hindu traders. According to the Syrian Christian tradition, the Manigramattars is that they were a group that had originally come from the cola country. The Manigramattar were most probably Hindu traders. Membership of a guild seems to have been open to all merchants irrespective of their religion, on the west coast. Where trade was in the hands of the Christian merchants for a long time, it might have been possible that the Manigramam organization had Christian merchants also in its rolls along with many other Hindu merchants.

The Manigramam merchants enjoyed a special position as compared to the other merchants. Goods from outside came into the locality and there was local demand for these goods. There was no hint here of self-sufficient isolated village communities and a subsistence economy. On the other hand, the movement of trade is indicated as well as the opening up of village communities to itinerant traders. They had the buying capacity and a market in rural areas for goods other than those produced locally including overseas wares flourished. The Talakkad inscription provides a useful insight into the relationship established

between a village community and local and itinerant merchants on the West Coast of South India. In the Tamil country, in the thirteenth century and the first decade of the fourteenth century, the Manigramam was associated with the distribution of commodities for internal and overseas trade. Their base, judging by the content of the inscriptions in which they are mentioned, was at Kodumbalur in the present District of Pudukkottai. Dated in the early thirteenth century an inscription found in the Rajarajacolisvaramudaiyar temple at Koilpatti, Kullitalai taluk, Tiruchchirappalli district mentioned the Manigramam of Kodumbalur. A major inscription of the thirteenth century found at Piranmalai was issued by the Ayyavole guild and the Citrameli Periyannattar and in this also the Manigramam of Kodumbalur was mentioned.

Ainnurruvar

Many subsequent inscriptional notices of the merchant guilds were located at coastal sites, the earliest inscription referring to the merchant guild of the five hundred swamis of Ayyavole. This guild is found in the Central Deccan Plateau at Aihole, which is the present-day Hungund taluk of the Bijapur district. Aihole inscriptions which refer to the merchant guild Ayyavole, range chronologically from the eighth century to the early twelfth century. Within the geographical area in which Aihole is situated, the Raichur doab, and many other known inscriptions are referring to the activity of the guild. These inscriptions begin about the early Eleventh century and continue till the mid-thirteenth century. Aihole was also known as Ayyavole, Aryapura and Ahichchitra and these names are frequently used in the guild inscriptions. In one particular inscription of the mid-Twelfth century, the members of the guild are described as Ahichchitra Vinirggatarum i.e. those coming from Ahichchitra. In another inscription of the same period, Ahichchitra and Ayyavole are considered identical. Ayyavole, in the mystique which came to be associated with the guild, was considered the parent city of this corporate association. The members of the guild are described in inscriptions in phrases such as 'ornaments on the brow of that great lady, the city of Ahichchitra or the five hundred swamis of the illustrious town of Ayyavole' and so on. Regarding Aihole, from a close and meticulous examination of the epigraphs in which the guild is mentioned and which are found in Aihole. We obtain some idea of what were the origins of this corporation. The Ainnurruvar guild was very active in Pudukkottai and Ramnad regions. They had created many market centers in Tamil country. There were two major centers of merchant activity, Kamudi and Piranmalai. Members of several merchant organizations met and recorded their endowments to the local deities in a joint donation. In both records, reference is made to 18 pattanams, 32 valapurams and 64 kadigaitavalms from which members hailed. Some of them could be identified as well-known towns. Tavalam would seem to represent a fair while pattanam was undoubtedly a town of considerable commercial importance and more often a port. Valapuram would appear to be a growing trade centre. Some historians opined that valapuram must be pronounced as velpuram and it would be an adjacent area to the coast. Ainnurruvar guild increased their overseas commercial activity and controlled the movement of commodities in this area. They also fixed the rates of magamai and pattanappagudi. Some inscriptions refer to the joint actions and decisions of the different merchant bodies. They also refer to their control over the coastal towns. The Vaniga Nagarattar, Manigramam and Anjuvanam were also involved in such joint donations out of the income from taxes on imports and exports. Probably to the thirteenth century belongs one of the most impressive epigraphs issued by the Ayyavole guild. The inscription was found in the Sokkanatha temple at Piranmalai, Ramanathapuram District. The Piranmalai hill borders the neighbouring Tirumayam taluk of Pudukkottai. The inscription is in Tamil and is remarkable for its literary quality. It was jointly issued with the Citrameli a powerful agricultural organization and registered the levy of tolls on commodities passing through the region. In it were also noted in detail the many organizations, towns, Nadu, Valanadu, and eleven groups of Nagarattar who joined with the Ayyavole guild for the protection of trade.

Nanadesi

Nanadesi is another big organization of merchants. The term Nanadesi is self-explanatory (multi-national). It traced its origin from Ayyavolepura in the Chalukya Kingdom or it had been used as a synonym of Ainnurruvar and seems to be similar to Padinen-vishayan. The terms padinenbhumi and Nanadesi appear as qualifying Ainnurruvar in the Samuttrapatti inscription. An inscription from Mysore furnishes important

and interesting details of the myths relating to the origin and organization of this guild. The articles of merchandise by them are also listed in this inscription. According to this inscription, they traded elephants, well-bred horses, precious stones, spices, perfumes and drugs. By land and sea routes they visited Chera, Chola, Pandya, Malaya, Kerala, Saurashtra, Nepal, Lambakarna and many other countries. In Tamil country the Nanadesis are comparable to the Nanadesis Tisaiyirattu Ainnurruvar, meaning the five hundred of the thousand directions in all countries. There was a record of land sales between Nanadesis and Ainurruvar, which would hardly have taken place if they had not been separate organizations. Nanadesis guild seemed to have been quite active in the area around Tirumayam on the borders of the Pandya country even in the ninth century A.D. Many lithic records relating to the guild were found in Sri Lanka and Mianmar.

The mention of paradesis and Nanadesis testifies to the presence of a colony of merchants from foreign countries. The ubhaya Nanadesi was mentioned so frequently in the Kannada inscriptions. They were probably a group, which traded both within the country and outside. Some scholars suggest that the Nanadesis were the leaders of Valangai group. Nanadesis lived in their commercial centres called 'virapattanas'. They were honoured by the king with characters of trade or 500 vira sasanas, which endowed them with special rights and privileges. They had their emblems and code of conduct on dharma. They followed various creeds Saivism, Jainism and others. They worshipped the plough share and the peddler's pack. They are said to have padinensamaya, vishya and bhumi. Nanadesi guild in Pandya times had their original links with Ayyapolil. The Devipattinam alias Jayapolil Vikramangalam was an active merchant base of Nanadesis in A.D.1264. A whole city was populated by merchants and it was called after those traders as Perunderu like Madurodaya Perunderu. Nanadesi merchants lived in this Perunderu. In Aruviyur, Sivaganga district an inscription of Nanadesi mentioned that these merchants lived in a separate street called Nanadesiperunderu. Therefore it is ascertained that the Nanadesis were of the merchant community engaged in overseas trade. Holding their militia these traders took shares in the war booty in the contemporary period. Thus the trade in the 18 districts was under the Nanadesi guilds. Such guilds were also found in 18 districts in the south of Kaveri. Generally, the Nanadesis engaged in extensive foreign and internal trade. They traded cotton cloth, pepper and areca nut. On one occasion Nanadesis gathered in the nanadesi thiruvshal in the temple at Periyapattinam and they donated funds for the construction of thiruvshal. The tolls on areca nut and pepper were collected from the Nanadesi merchants and used for religious endowments. These articles were coming from different mandalas by boats and by head loads. An inscription dated in A.D.1362 mentions the Nanadesis had established a fair. This shows their interest in trading activities. At this fair, they displayed their merchandise for the benefit of the local people. Fairs were held on various days in neighbouring towns. Besides grains, bullocks, horses and even slaves were sold in these fairs. To attract business to the fair apparently, a concession was sometimes made. But those concessions were allowed only for a short period. They carried their merchandise on the backs of donkeys and buffaloes under the protection of their military guards of foot soldiers and swordsmen.

Padinenvishayattar

Padinenvishayattar was another guild and was involved in overseas trade. Padinen denotes the number eighteen. Vishayam refers to matter, sense, region and country. The word padinen is conventional. From the beginning the Tamils used this number eighteen as Padinen chittar, padinen kudimakkal, and padinenkilkanakku. The Tamil lexicon describes the padinenvishayam would have included the eighteen regions including Srilanka, Sonakam, Javakam, China and Tamilnadu. The inscriptions of padinenvishayattar are also found in Srilanka, Malaysia, Java and Sumatra. Through this, it can be concluded that the padinenvishayattar was an overseas traveling merchant who carried on their trade with eighteen countries. Pattanaswami was the head of the town and presided over the meetings of the merchant bodies and other local bodies. There is a reference in an inscription at Piranmalai about Pattinaswami. This head along with the members of the padinenvishaya levied cesses on merchandise in Piranmalai. It gives us the information that padinenvishayattar is involved in the pearl trade. An inscription found in Kilakarai refers to Padinenvishayattar guild. The 41st regnal year inscription relating to Kulasekara Pandya describes the inland trade activities of the padinenvishayattar. They had taken the goods from the ports to the inland

market centres. Pepper, areca nut, and rice were handled by the members of this guild. Like other guilds this guild religious endowment. Scholars argued that Buddhists but the guild were involved in many activities. They made donations to many relations with all other merchant guilds.

Anjuvanam

Another merchant guild that had trade relations with the Pandya Kingdom was the Anjuvanattar. As regards Anjuvanam, Venkayya considered it to be a semi-independent corporation. The privileges about such a body (Anjuvannap-peru) were conferred on Issuppu Irappanin the times of Bhaskara - Ravivarman. The present record is the only other material till now found where Anjuvanam has been referred to. This word had generally been considered to be a Tamil form of the foreign word Anjuman - an association. If so, some foreigners must have been residing at the seaside town of Tittandatanapuram, and formed themselves into a guild at the time when the record was made. From other sources, we know that a few Arab colonies had been formed in a few important ports on the east coast of south India, called the Mabar by the Arab sailors. At this time, i.e. towards the end of the 13th century, there was one such flourishing colony at Kayal at the mouth of the Tamraparani established by the Arab chieftain known as Maliku - Islam Jamall-ud-din. Thondi was also another seaport of some consequence in those days; and it is possible that at Tittandatanapuram which is only of lesser distance from Thondi, there may have also been a Muhammadan colony which could have been called as Anjuvanam Association.

Conclusion:

There were different kinds of guilds viz., the agriculturist's guild, the craft guild, the artisan guild, the merchant's guild and the caste guild. Among these, the merchant's guild was the best organized and economic organization. It played a vital role in the multipurpose activities of trade and commerce. They were also concerned with the administration of many townships, particularly the urban centres, which were very near to the ports or the coastal areas. The functions of the merchant guild were not confined to economic matters alone. They also played a prominent role in matters concerning social, religious, administrative and judicial affairs of the territory. They acted as trustees of both the rulers and the ruled. They received endowments of money or land from the rulers. They build and maintained charity houses, temples and tanks for the welfare of the public. The merchant's guilds were very powerful organizations in medieval times in the Pandya region and elsewhere in other parts of India.

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