

# HISTORICAL HERITAGES OF VANDAVASI TALUK – A STUDY

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## Abstract

Vandavasi is a Taluk of Thiruvannamalai District of Tamil Nadu. Vandavasi is also known as Wandiwash during it was a Taluk of North Arcot District. Vandavasi became the Taluk of Thiruvannamalai District when the Thiruvannamalai District was formed erstwhile North Arcot District on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1989.

Vandavasi is located at 12.5° North Latitude and 79.62° East Longitude. It lies 110 kms South-West of Chennai City, 40 kms South of famous temple City Kanchipuram and 80 kms North-East of Thiruvannamalai. Vandavasi is well connected with Chennai by road. Nearest Railway Station is located at Thiruvannamalai and nearest Airport is located at Chennai.

This study endeavor to highlight the historical monuments of Vandavasi Taluk as well as points out the Political and Cultural developments of the Taluk under various rulers. The required data thus composed and critically analysed about the historical backgrounds of Vandavasi Taluk.

**Key Word:** Vandavasi, Wandiwash, North Arcot, Thiruvannamalai

## Introduction:

Damarla Chennapa Nayaka, the Poligar (A tributary of Vijayanagar Emperor Venkatapathi Raya) of Kalahasti and Wandiwash granted permission to the British East India Company to build a factory and warehouse for their trading enterprises in 1640.

Vandavasi Taluk is one of the identified Clusters of micro and small enterprise of Korai mat and

Handloom. It is also one of the Taluk headquarters in Thiruvannamalai District having Handloom weaving

hereditarily. Kilkodungalur, Vazoor, Ponnur, Kunnagampoondi, Chitharugavur, Vedal and Ammaiypattu are the Villages having Handloom weaving more than 100 years.

As of 2011 Census, Vandavasi Taluk had the total population of 3,36,121. The average Literacy of the Taluk was 74.53%. The name Vandavasi is mentioned in some Tamil Movies such Simma Rasi, Vishnu and Thoranai. Vandavasi Taluk was previously played a vital role a Battle Field where the Thellar War, Desur War and Wandiwash Battle placed and left its historical and political dominance.

Under the rule of Pallava, Chola, Nayaka and Vijayanagar Empire the Taluk remained the Treasure of Cultural and Political heritages. Through this study we could see some of the Historical and Cultural monuments of Vandavasi Taluk as stated below.

**Avanibhajana Pallaveshvaram Temple:** A Cave temple located in the village Seeyamangalam of Vandavasi Taluk. It lies amidst a group of hills at a distance of about 2 miles from Desur, in the other flank of a large irrigation-tank. Besides this tank at its rear, there is another large tank in front with a tall pillar-like rock in it, which probably gave the name of Stambhesvara or thoonandavar to the temple. The temple called in its earlier inscriptions Avanibhajana Pallaveshvaram. Avanibhajana ( a title of Mahendravarman I) means 'Possessor of the Earth'.

The temple was constructed in rock-cut architecture by the Pallava King Mahendravarman I (580 - 630 CE) during 7<sup>th</sup> century. The temple had structural additions of the late Pallava, Chola and Vijayanagar times. It is a large excavation made into the almost vertical scarp of a huge boulder facing West with a Mandapa in front a shrine-cell behind.

The Shrine for Nandhi is located outside the pillared hall axial to the central Shrine. The Sanctum house has the image of Shiva in the form of Lingam. The temple has the earliest representation of Nataraja in Sculpture, spotted with four hands. One of the left hands showing 'Dola Hasta Posture' and 'Parasu' in the second left hand. 'Abhaya Mudra' (Protecting Posture) in the first right hand and 'Fire' in the second right hand.

The temple is declared as a heritage monument and administered by the archaeological survey of India as a protected monument. Though it is an archaeological monument the worship in this temple is traditional. The temple priests perform the Puja (Rituals) during festival and daily basis. The temple Rituals are similar to that of other Shiva temples.

Ponnur Hill: This place is Tapo Bhumi of great and brilliant Digambar Jain Acharya Bhagawat KundKund Dev. This is the only sacred place where Acharya KundKund Dev practiced for Penance, Self-recognition and Purification. Ancient foot images of Acharya KundKund Dev were present here and revered by the devotees daily.

The Pancha Paramagamas (Samay Sara, Pravachar Sara, Niyam Sara, Ashta Pahua, Panchastikaya Samagraha) were written at the Ponnur Hill. These texts motivate the reader to accept RatnaTraya ( Right Faith, Right Knowledge, Right Conduct) in his life and thus to follow the path of Salvation.

There are two ancient Digambar Jain Temples at Ponnur. First is Adinath Mandir situated in the foot of Ponnur Hill and the Second is Ajitnath Mandir at a distance of half kilometer from the hill.

Adinath Mandir is an ancient temple adorned with Spire, ancient idol of the Chief Deity Bhagwan Adinath is installed. An artistic idol of Bhagwan Mahaveer carved on a flat stone is also placed here. Artistic Umbrella (Spire) is carved over the head of the idol on both sides of his bearing Devs (Yaksha) are carved in beautiful manner.

Thennangur: Earlier known as Dakshina Halasyam (A Place where the Wise drink Nectar) and is the site of uniquely designed Sri Panduranga Temple. According to Puraanaas, this Village is the birth place of Goddess Lakshmi. It is also known as Shedaranya Kshetra (Six Forests) as this place was full of forests.

The famous Panduranga temple was built with a combination of both the Northern and Southern styles of architecture. This temple resembles the Puri Jagannath Temple in Odisha. The front Gopurams are constructed in the Pallava style of architecture. The temple features a 120 ft tall Tower (Vimanam)

topped by a 9½ ft Gold Kalasam with the Sudharsan Chakra (Disk of Panduranga) and a Saffron coloured flag flying above the Tower.

Another rare element of this temple is the presence of a historical idol of Achutharay Perumal, which was brought from Tirumala Tirupathi. The temple follows both the Orthodox Sampradaya (Tradition) of the South and the Bhajan Sampradaya of the North.

The temple is famous for the Vishukani Utsav festival that falls on the Tamil New Year's day. The Muththanki Sevai (Gem Armour) festival is celebrated on the day of Gokulashtami.

Marudhadu Sri Purandhareeswarar Temple: Marudhadu is one of the villages in Vandavasi Taluk. It is located at a distance of 83 kms East of Thiruvannamalai and 10 kms of Vandavasi. The Village Marudhadu was called as Vikrama Chozapuram in the special name of the Chola King Rajendran I (1032 A.D) on his rule.

The temple specially constructed near the East side of the main road. The three layered Rajagopuram of the temple facing west. The placement of the Shrines is slightly different from other temples. So that the temple also knowns as temple of Orientation. Unlike other temples a Murugan Sannidhi placed behind the Chief Deity. West facing Bairavar and Surya Bagwan are also the special elements of this temple. The exterior walls of the temple were filled with stone Inscriptions which contain a lot of information about the Village, Temple and Grants of the Chola Kings.

According to the stone inscriptions the temple was called as Perunthirukkoyil and the God as Perunthirukkoyil Udayaar till the last of 16<sup>th</sup> century. Then the name of the temple is changed such Sri Purandhareeswarar temple which the name Purandharan denotes Indhiran. So that the Goddess name of the temple become Indhirappasaatha Valli.

Monolithic Stone: Korakkottai, a Village of Vandavasi Taluk become the newest Pilgrimage site by the Charnokite rock sculpted for 64 feet tall statue of Vishwaroopa Mahavishnu.

Sadananda, a trustee of Kodhandarama Swamy Temple, Bengaluru found this rocky hillock through satellite imagery and secured the Tamil Nadu Government's permission to cut and transport the rocks to

Bengaluru. After obtaining the permission from the officials and Mine department, the monoliths weighing over 300 metric tonnes engaged to carve 64 ft tall statue. The head of the God rock is smeared with Red and Yellow hand prints of devotees and names of some of the pilgrims are scribbled in Turmeric. The management of the temple trust repaired and widened the road along the by-pass for transporting the gigantic rock.

Stone Inscriptions: Some of the stone inscriptions were found at the nearby villages of Vandavasi Taluk, which were belonged to 10<sup>th</sup> century and 15<sup>th</sup> century respectively. Those stone inscriptions were exposed the ruler of the particular regime, status of the people and their grants to the temple. A 10<sup>th</sup> century (CE) stone inscription found at Erumbur Village of Vandavasi Taluk. The inscription reportedly mentions an incident of 45 goats being granted to the temple by a person named 'Nakkan Madaniyan'. It is also stated that the location as 'Venkundra Kottathu Erumbur', which reveals the village name remains unchanged over 1000 years that still exists as Erumbur. The other inscription states the presiding deity in the local Sivan temple which is called Brahmeeswara Udayar and Kamakottamudaya Periya Nachiyar.

A stone inscription was found at Japthikarani, a nearby Village of Vandavasi. According to the fonts of the stone inscriptions seems that the inscription belonged to 10<sup>th</sup> century. There are no details about the name of the ruler and its proper time. The stone inscription has a total of 26 lines. It states about a person named Chandraadithan, son of Karikalar who granted some land to a Jain monastery which was situated at Sree Dhandipuram. The person granted the land to supply water for the flower garden of the Jain monastery.

A 15<sup>th</sup> century (CE) stone inscription found at Mavalavadi village of Vandavasi Taluk. During the regime of Vijayanagar King Sadhasiva Maharayar, one of his commanders Thirumalai Devamagarayar Ramarasayyar asked people of Mavalavadi village to work for the renovation of Lakshmi Narasimmar temple at Tindivanam for the wellbeing of Sadhasiva Maharayar. Out of the total 34 lines of the inscription, the first seven lines praising the Empire, the next four lines talks about the period and the rest of the lines describes how the people from Mavalavadi village contributed to the renovation of the temple.

Hero Stones: Two hero stones belonging to 5<sup>th</sup> century (CE) were discovered at Desur Village of Vandavasi. These hero stones were erected in the memory of Kotramba Kizhar and his son Seelan during the rule of Bana King. The 4 feet tall stones have Tamil inscriptions and pictorial depictions of a father-son duo holding sword and shield in their hands. According to the inscriptions at that time of Bana rule, Cattle grazing were considered one of the prime occupations of people and it was common for Villages and small Kingdoms to fight for Cattle ownership. These stones seem to portray the bravery of the two who apparently sacrificed their lives to protect the village and the residents' wealth from the enemies.

Thellar War (834 CE): The Thellar War was fought between the Pallava King Nandhivarman III and the Pandiya King Varaguna Pandiyan in 834 C.E. According to the Thillasthana stone inscription, which was carved for Nandhivarman III at 10<sup>th</sup> year of his Crown, he was honoured as Thellaarerindha Nandhivarman who won the Thellar War against Varaguna Pandiyan. The Thellar War identified as most important war of all other wars fought by Nandhivarman III. A Tamil literature called Nandhi Kalampagam was written for Nandhivaraman III. The Kalampagam expresses the valour and pride of the Pallava King Nandhivarman III. It honours the victory over Pandiya King Varaguna Pandiyan at Thellar War, and mentions it many times in the literature. Unlike other Kalampagam Nandhi Kalampagam remains such a historical one.

Desur War (1693 CE): This war was fought between the Mughals and Mahrattas in 1693 CE. Desur War was a part of siege of Gingee. After Sambhaji's death (Mahratta King Shivaji's eldest son) his infant son Saahu was proclaimed Head of the Mahrattas, while an uncle Raja Ram was appointed regent. The Mughals succeeded in capturing the youth and Raja Ram at once usurped the throne, establishing himself at Gingee. Eight years he withstood the not very energetic attempts of the Mughal general Zulfikar Khan to reduce his fortress.

The Mughal captains were let loose upon the Carnatic to demand contributions. Those Villages which had the temerity to refuse compliance with their demand were plundered, while those who acquiesced were left with barely sufficient to ward off actual starvation.

In 1693, the Mughal troops transport food groceries from Vandavasi to their camp. Near Desur the Mahratta soldiers attacked the Mughal troops. At that time the Mughal Commander Rao and the soldiers of Pundhela saved the Mughals from the Mahratta's attack. After a siege of eight years Gingee was taken, but RajaRam escaped and fled to Vellore whence he removed to Satara and surrounded by himself with another large army.

Wandiwash Battle (1760 CE): The French and British East India Companies fought three Carnatic Wars in the Deccan. These wars sealed the future political standards of British colony rule throughout India. The treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748 closed the war in Europe and restored to the company their settlement at Madras. It should have closed the contest between the two nations in India, but Dupleix, who was at the head of affairs at Pondicherry, perceived that his superiority to the establishment of a French Empire in India. For the accomplishment of his plans he further resolved to take advantage of the general unpopularity of the reigning Nawab.

When the war of 1756 (Seven Year's War) broke out between the French and British nations in Europe, the Government of the former country resolved to make a grand attempt to regain their influence in the East and to secure for themselves the exclusive commerce of the country. The French general Count Lally arrived at Pondicherry on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1758, and at once committed a fatal error in recalling Bussy from Hyderabad, where he had just succeeded in establishing his influence with in the territories of the Nizam. He with reluctance obeyed the orders of his Chief, and marched Southwards with all the troops under his command.

Wandiwash had been constituted the head-quarter of the French in this portion of the Carnatic, and from thence several expeditions had been made against the Nawab's forts in the neighbourhood. British Colonel Coote arrived at Wandiwash on November 28<sup>th</sup> of 1760 and found that Major Brereton had already got into position a battery against the Southwest angle of the fort. After the mutiny at Wandiwash, Lally had removed a large portion of his army to the South. It was in consequence of this error that Coote had been able to capture Wandiwash with little difficulty and Lally now realizing his mistake, recalled almost the whole of the French army from the neighbourhood of Trichinopoly (Trichy), whither he had sent it. He

also secured at a high price of the services of a large body of Mahrattas who had been waiting at Kadapanattam to see which side would offer the more liberal terms. With these Lally advanced, about the middle of January 1760 and laid siege to Wandiwash. At last British East India Company won the decisive battle and stopped the desire of French Empire in India such a strong manner.

## Conclusion

The Vandavasi Taluk consists large number of historical monuments, very few of them listed here. There are much more to be known about the Taluk's features and heritages. The Vandavasi fort and the artilleries which were used at Wandiwash Battle remind the vision of political importance of the Taluk in the past. The harmony of the people with different beliefs and tradition is remarkable. The Vandavasi Taluk stands unique with untold, unseen and unspoken an historical, cultural and political treasure that holds itself. The other cultural and spiritual monument helps the people spiritually and educationally and also as religious tourist place. The peoples' visit with zeal for pilgrimage from other states is getting increase.

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