

THE RIVER THENPENNAI SO SECRET TREASURES TROVE: INVESTIGATION OF MARANGIYUR TEMPLE

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Abstract

The present paper is considered as one of the important places in South India. It has a rich archaeological potential which could be studied in a deeper account. Pennaiyar (or) Thenpennai, previously called as Ponnaiyar (Takshina Pinakini) rises in the Chennarayan Betta hills in Karnataka and flows southwards and turn to east through Eastern Ghats for entering the Hosur Taluk of Krishnagiri district. The river valley forms into two divisions namely upper and lower river valley. Marangiyur is a non-descript village in Villuppuram district on the banks of the river Thenpennai. Right at the edge of the village on the banks of the river, is the Parvathavardhini Samedha Sri Ramalingeswarar Temple. There are a number of idols in and around the temple belonging to the Pallava period and before. However, there is no concrete evidence of when this temple was first built. The Thenpennai explorations yielded different types of potteries, coins, constructional remains, glass objects and various other material evidences. The present study would be a source book for the future research works which would enhance and enrich the ancient history of this to a great extent.

Key Words : Geomorphological, Anthropology and *Devadana*.

Methodology

Inscriptions are the major and authentic source material for writing the history of the temple when the literary sources are scanty and silent. It is considered to be the life, blood, history and forms the most authentic and contemporary evidence. Without epigraphical sources, the proper history of the temple, particularly the history of the medieval Tamil country, could not have been written. The Methodology adopted in this study is descriptive and analytical.

Numerous eminent experts have performed substantial fieldwork in various locations of Tamilnadu from the early 19th century in order to further our understanding of the cultural processes of human life from the Paleolithic to the Historical times. ¹ Thanks to several unexpected findings that were made in various locations, it was possible to identify the transitional time between many cultural periods. Some of the results contributed to the understanding of the cultural links between different cultural zones. ² The geology, geography, and other pertinent factors of the area have had a significant impact on the development of the many cultural stages in

Tamilnadu.³ Resources, various technologies that were adapted (for making different types of stone tools and, in later periods, metal objects), and any instincts that could have survived propelled the people to create new settlements in the region where they had been living for centuries (transforming their nomadic lifestyle into an agro-pastoral one and, in later periods, a society based on economic condition due to the development in the metal technology). The river valleys are an important consideration when considering a region's many eco-zones. The Palar, Pennaiyar, Vaigai, and Kaveri river basins in Tamilnadu's delta region include a range of resources.⁴

The area covered in the present study is thought to be important in South India. It has a plethora of archaeological potential that might be further explored. Pennaiyar, formerly known as *Ponnaiyar*, is derived from the Chennarayan Betta hills in Karnataka (Takshina Pinakini). From there, it travels south before turning east and passing over the Eastern Ghats to reach the Hosur Taluk in the Krishnagiri district. Later, it travels through the Dharmapuri neighbourhood before crossing Chengam Pass and entering the Thiruvannamalai neighbourhood.⁵ Later, this river drains Cuddalore and Villupuram districts. The river valley is divided into two divisions, the upper and lower river valleys. Geomorphologically, they are very different from one another, resulting in two distinct cultural zones. The Markandanadi (also known as Cinnaru), Turunchi, Pampar, and Vaniyar are four large tributaries of the upper and middle Pennaiyar that reach deep into the valley but are hardly of any use for farming. The upper Pennaiyar valley is mostly a basin area, but the lower Pennaiyar valley has a deltaic nature. The upper river basin had a large number of cultural artefacts from a wide range of historical eras, including the Paleolithic and the Medieval. Fewer field surveys were conducted in the lower valley than in the upper valley. The studies conducted also revealed a number of grave markers.⁶

As can be seen from their writings, the Sangam poets were aware of the areas close to the Pennaiyar river basin. *Puranaanuru*, for instance, cites the Sei clan leader *Nannan* (of the Naagar family), who ruled the Chengam region (Chengai Ma) (151). He is also referred to as Cevvarainaatan in *Perumpanaarrupadai* (103). The Pennaiyar river basin contains 7 sites that were important locales during the Sangam period. The river Cheyyar, which drains the red soil and passes through the red mountain range, is referred to as Ceyaru in *Malaipatukatam* (476, 555). The same book refers to a hill known as *Naviram*, which is located on the northern bank of the Cheyyar (*Malaipatukatam*: 82, 579).⁸ This area was governed by a chieftain by the name of Atiyaman and was situated halfway between Thiruvannamalai and Dharmapuri. Residents of Tondai nadu utilised this location, also known as Chengam pass, to reach Takaturnadu, whose ruler was Atiyaman Neduman Anci during the Sangam era. With this in mind, a thorough investigation of the abundant natural resources of the Pennaiyar river basin was carried out, taking into consideration many dimensions of anthropology, archaeology, geology, and other pertinent fields. It tries to conduct a thorough inquiry to understand the numerous cultural traits that developed in the study area. Additionally, the purpose of the study is to identify probable connections between various locations and various cultural eras. The geographic distribution, chronology, architectural style, and iconography of the sculptures are used in the research to retrace the early history of the area.⁹

The nondescript village of Marangiur is located in the Villupuram district along the banks of the river Thenpennai. Nearby the town is the Parvathavardhini Samedha Sri Ramalingeswarar Temple, which is situated on the riverbanks. There are several idols within and around the temple that date back to the Pallava period and earlier. It is uncertain when year this temple was actually first built. There are a total of 27 inscriptions from this temple included in the Annual Epigraphy Report for 1935–1936.¹⁰ These inscriptions reveal that Lord Ramalingeswara was also known as Thiruvirameswarar and that Rajendrasinganallur was the name of the locality in Rajaraja Valanadu's Kudal-Iladappadi.

The Malaiyaman lord of Kiliyur, Periyudaiyan Attimalan, also known as Vikrama Choa Vaakularayan, is credited for placing the Goddess Parvatha Vardhini, according to an inscription from the second year of Kulottuga Chola. The Goddess was referred to as Tirupaiyarai Auaiya or Kamakota Nachiyar in the inscription.¹¹ An inscription from Raja Mahendradeva's fourth year mentions the *Mahasabha* of Nelvayappkkam alias Rajendra Chaturvedimagalam, a *brahmadeya* in *Valanadu*, as a gift of 500 *kuli* of *samudaya* (common) land for the sacred bath, light, and offerings as an atonement for some damage the deity's image had sustained on the occasion.¹²

The liquid measure Arulmozhidevan is mentioned in one of the Kulothunga inscriptions. The Oiyangalabhai caused several shrines in the *devadana* villages of the temple of Tiruvirmvaram-Uaiyar to become inactive, as well as the temple itself falling into disrepair and the *devadanas* becoming neglected. It is interesting to note that an inscription from the reign of Saluva Narasimha states that after these taxes, such as *jodi* etc., were waived on these lands and places of worship.¹³

One of Konerinmaikondan's many inscriptions mentions the contribution of 12 *maa* of *devadana* land for temple improvements in his 21st year. Marangiyur is supposed to be a part of Idaiyaru parru in Thirumunaipadi nadu. According to an inscription from his 22nd year, Maringulan's sons Tirumagalmudaiyar and Suryadevar are credited for constructing the Nandi *mandapa*.¹⁴ Aramaiudaiyal, the daughter of Mulaiyelundal Periyai, erected the *balipeeda*, and Madalvi, the daughter of Kolangondal, a *devaradiyar* of the temple, constructed the *tirumaligai* and *tiruvasal*, according to an inscription from the sixth year of Vira Rajendra deva.¹⁵

The temple also included inscriptions from the periods of Vijayanagara rulers Rajanarayana Sambuvaraya, Rajadhirajadeva, Jatavarman Sundarapandyan, Vikrama Chola, Maravarman Parkrama Pandya, Achutya Maharaya, and Vira Bhupathi Udayar in addition to the inscriptions described above.¹⁶

The Thenpennai explorations turned up many types of pottery, coins, fragments of buildings, glass artefacts, and other tangible artefacts. The locations under examination should thus be properly and scientifically studied.¹⁷ But with careful fieldwork, we might unearth a wealth of cultural treasures connected to numerous cultural traits. Thanks to the observations made about the cultural artefacts and the extensive and critical investigations on the material evidence acquired so far, we are able to trace the ancient history of this region from the Palaeolithic period to the Historical period. The current study will be used as a guide for future studies that will significantly enhance and enrich this topic's ancient history.¹⁸

In spite of restoration efforts undertaken during the Chola and Vijayanagara eras, the temple gradually fell apart a few decades ago. Over time, the temple deteriorated and started to fall.¹⁹ The citizens of the area are working very hard to rebuild it. The God and Goddess are positioned within a makeshift shed. The unbroken stones from the original temple have all been removed, numbered, and are being used to reconstruct the structure. While there is currently no water in Thenpennai, efforts have been made to raise the land's elevation above the river's level before work started in order to save the temple from being eroded as in the past.

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