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VANGAM AND TAMILNADU

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The earliest reference to the country of “Vanga” (obviously Bengal) occurs in 270 CE in an inscription of King of Ikshuvakus, (of the country of later Eastern Chalukyas of East Coast) King Virapurusha Datta. The inscription was found at Nagarjunakonda, the famous Buddhist site in Andhrapradesh. A certain lady Bodhisri along with her husband, parents and relatives paved a Buddha Chaitya at this site with stones and carried out a number of additions to the Buddhist centre including a structure, for a Buddhist Acharya, Achanda Acharya, who had a large number of disciples from different (countries) regions.

The regions from where the disciples came are listed as follows:

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| 1. Kasmira | 7. Aparanta |
| 2. Gandhara | 8. “Vanga” |
| 3. China | 9. Vanavasi |
| 4. Kirata | 10. Gavana |
| 5. Tosali | 11. Damila |
| 6. Palura | 12. Tamraparnidvipa |

This means there were extensive contacts between India and China in the North-east of India to Gandhara country, in North-west (Afganistan and Baluchistan and Balkan states) in the North-west and Damila country (Tamilnadu) and beyond Srilanka – called Tamraparnidvipa, in inscriptions and all regions in India. Since an extensive contact here, referred to though for religious study, it obviously included trade as well. The Indian trade guild was called one thousand five hundred groups, from one thousand directions (*Disai ayirattu ainuruvar*) which must have been either established in the time of Asoka (or even earlier). For this record of Virapurusha is dated 270 CE, and points to contacts earlier.

Please note the name “Vanga” is specifically included in this list (Ref. Vogel, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XX, p. 22). This must be read in conjunction with the record of Kharavela of Kalinga, first century BCE, who refers to his conquest of “Dwavida Sanga”. In his eleventh year of regime, Kharavela, conquered the Kings of Dravida Sangha, which was one hundred and thirteen years old. In the next year he conquered the Pandya King and received from him as tribute hundreds of thousands of pearls. It establishes the contacts between the Pandya country in the south of India and the Kalinga country on the east coast.

We may also draw attention to one King “Varna Pala”, a ruler of a region near Varanasi in Ramnagar district. The King was named “Ashada Sena”. The record is dated first century BC,

in the time of king Udaka who excavated a cave in a hill near Pabosa, in Kosam in Allahabad district. This Ashada Sena was the son King Udaka (Ref. Vogel, *Epigraphia Indica*, XX, p. 20).

राजः गोपालीपुत्रस्य बृहहस्पती मित्रस्य मातुलेन गोपालिका वैहिदरी पुत्रेण आषाढसेनेन लयनं कारितम् उदाकस्य दशम संवत्सरे काश्यपीयान अर्हन्तानम् ।

There are two inscriptions from Bangladesh, one come from Kulkudi, Faridpur district of Bangladesh and the second comes from Betka in Dhaka district of Bangladesh. The first one was on the pedestal of an image of Surya in the reign of Govinda Chandra, dated in his 19th regnal year, reading, the image is called Dinakara Bhattarāka, in the reign of Govinda Chandra Pada, month Phalguna, date 19. The God is portrayed as riding a chariot, driven by seven horses.

The second is a stone image of Vasudeva, seated in the reign of Govinda Chandra, in his regnal year, 23rd year, by one Gangadasa, son of Bodajilladasa which is said to be year of Govinda Chandra. He was defeated by Rajendra Chola I of Tamilnadu during his conquest of Gangetic plain. Rajendra in his *prasasti* refers to him as the King of “Vangala Desa” where rain waters never cease to flow. It is seen that Vangala Desa of Govinda Chandra was also a target of attack by the Chola. It reveals that Vangala Desa was well known in Tamilnadu during the middle chola period. This also points to the contact between the Chola land and Vangala Desa (Ref. N. K. Bhattasali, *Epigraphia Indica*, XXVII, pp. 24-26).

Tamilnadu had close contact with Vanga country (Bengal) from its known history since 1st century BCE. The Eastern coastal route, familiarly known as Cholamandalam, provided easy navigation along the sea, through ships. While the land route, which was a little more difficult, as one has to cross through big perennial rivers like Krishna, Godavari and Mahanadi. It is well-known that the sea now called Bay of Bengal, was then known as Vanga-kadal (Bengal Sea) for the past two thousand years and more, obviously derived from Bengal. B. N. Mukherjee has suggested that the word Vanga is derived from Ganga.

The Tamils are referred to in his edict by Asoka Maurya, in the 3rd century BCE, especially the three crowned Kings, the (Keralaputras) Chera, Cholas, Pandya and also the Satyaputras (Atiyaman). Asoka says their country fell outside his empire. The other king of fame to refer to the Tamils as Dravida and their abodes and their Sanga, in the first century BCE was Kharavela. There are references to Tamils in early Lankan inscription. In Tamilnadu itself several Brahmi inscriptions assignable to 2nd century BCE and later, refer to Jaina ascetics and their abodes and also their *Nistikas*, written in Brahmi characters. They point out that both literary ideas and the scripts from the north have been adopted by the Tamils. The Tamilnad is very rich in Tamil poems, between 1st century BCE to 2nd century C.E. They have been compiled and composed into eight anthologies and ten long poems. There are altogether 2800 poems out of which about 2300 songs are on *sringāra* themes, and the rest are centered on exploits like liberal patronage, wars, victories, erecting memorial stones etc. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer who edited these poems brilliantly has listed 494 poets who composed these poems. Out of

these 250 poets bear north Indian names, which is an indication of Northern poets writing Tamil poems in the beginning of Tamil history. Some such names are Vānmiki, Gautaman, Bhāradvājan, Kapilan, Brahman, Parasaran, Kausikan, Kāsyapan and others who figure as master poets in Tamil. What is more important from the point of this article is one of the poets was called 'Vanganar' evidently from the Vanga country. There are references to "Vangam" as a country, Vangam as the sea and Vangam as a ship and also Vanga as a bird, probably some birds perched on the ships that came from Vanga Desa, through the sea.

One poet who was a resident of Alattur was called 'Alattur Vanganar', whose poems are found in three anthologies namely *Puranānuru*, *Ahanānuru* and *Narrinai*, indicating that this poet's songs were respected to be included in the anthologies. These poems are assignable from 1st century BCE to 1st century CE. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer has listed him in his work on "the poets of Sangam age" (U.V.S Centenary Publication, Chennai, 90, 1986, p.1) Vanganār, shows he hailed from Vangam (Bengal). Evidently learned men from Vangam have settled in Tamilnadu, mastered Tamil language and have enriched the language.

Sangam Tamil Literature:

The Brāhmanās of the village, Thiru Eraham, one of the famous pilgrim Centre for Lord Muruga, were well learned in Vedas and performed the three Vedic rites in three altars, took bath wearing cloth from Kālakam. (lines 184 *Thiru -muruku- ātruppadaī*) and adored Lord Muruga wearing the wet cloth. Naccinārkkiniyar, a medieval commentator, giving the meaning of the word *Kāzagam* says it refers to Kalinga cloth (*pularanta kādakam pular uditī - nīrādungkāl kalingam udambilē kidantu ulara*). Kalinga is modern Orissa on the east coast of India.

Another Sangam poem refers to *Kādakam* cloth, came by the sea, it should have come from *Kadāgam* to Bengal and Kalinga and later brought by ships to Tamilnadu coast. A point of interest is the word *Kalingam* is used for a kind of silk in many Tamil texts (*kalingattu pattu*). Shiva is said to be fond of wearing *Kalinga* silk. Whether these silken cloth were produced in Kadāram, or brought from China and from there came to Tamilnad deserves study (p.72).

Puranānuru:

In *Puranānuru*, another collection of Sangam poems, verse 17, refers to a fight between the Chera, Māntaran ceral Irumporai, and the Pāndya, the great victor of Talai-ālan-kānam. There seems to have been a fight between these two at 'Tondi', a port town, while the commentator simply says, Tondi on the coast, it was probably the port of the Pandya, attacked by the Chera. The later lost the battle and was imprisoned. (U.V. Swaminatha Iyer in his note says, that Tondi was another port of that name, in the west coast). This note was written when scholars identified "Karur" the capital of the Chera, was at the west coast. But recent excavations at Karur in Trichy district under my direction, has proved the Karur in Trichy district, was the capital of Cheras of Sangam age. So it is likely that Tondi of this poem, may mean the famous port, Tondi of the

Pāndya as the poem deals with the battle of Pāndya and Chera and the Tondi South of Madurai was famous then as an important port in the East coast (*Puram 17*).

Madurai kānchi:

The reference to *Kālakam* as “blue silk”, named after Kadāram, is referred to in the long poem *Madurai kānchi*, (a poem in *Pattupāttu*) dealing with Madurai, the capital of the Pāndya. It has been shown that the silks from *Kālakam* (*Kadāram*) were received in the Pāndya capital. This poem was sung by the poet Māngudi Marudanār, who sang the Pāndya Nedumchezhiyan, the victor of Talal-ālam-kāanam.

The occasion is when the festival of “*Onam*”, the natal star of Lord Krishna, when heroic soldiers, chased war elephants in a festive mock sport, the elephant riders held “two broad bordered blue silk” in front of them to slow down the run of the elephants. This silk is called in “*Nedumkarai Kāzhakam*”, The “Kadaram silk” with broad borders in a mock fight in the streets of heroes points to the popularity of silk from Kadāram.

Pattinappālai:

Among the Ten Idyls, consisting of Ten long poems, included in the Sangam group of Tamil poems, two poems are of great importance to the present study. The first is *Pattinappalai*, a long poem, on the Chola emperor Karikala, by one Kadiyalur Rudran Kannanar. The second is *Maduraikkānci*. *Pattinappālai* gives a description of the port town of Kaveripumpattinam also called Pumpuhar where the river Kaveri joins the sea. It was the port of Sangam Cholas especially for its sea trade, with Bengal and also Kadaham (the Kedah). Pumpuhar also served as the capital of the same dynasty.

It describes the port town of Kaveripattinam. It has a long description of merchandise coming from different countries, especially from South-east Asia. It says that horses were brought by ships through the sea; (it may be a reference to Arabian countries). Precious gems; the Rubies and a kind of gold came from Himalayas; sandalwood and *Ahir* (fragrant wood) came from western ghats, pearls from southern and eastern oceans brought silk; corals; from Ganga, (*Ganga-vāri*) products of water, and products from *Kādagam* – *kadāram*, *Ariyantam* – very precious objects from China, especially camphor, *kumkum*, *paninir*, etc., were available in the shops of Kaveri pattinam. Speakers of different languages remained congregated in Kaveripumpattinam. There is also a reference that Sonakar and Chinese were present amongst them. The foreign people mixed freely with locals and moved happily (lines 185-199).

This description is illustrations of products from other countries were freely available in the shopping streets of Pumpuhar, confirm the contacts this town had with other countries.

The second one is the long poem *Maduraikkānchi* sung by poet Māngudi Marudanār on the capital city of Madurai of the Pandya Neduncheliyan, 1st century CE. The Pandyas had a port town Tondi about 15 miles from Madura. Tondo on the east coast was the main port of

the Pandyas on the one hand and a connecting link between Bengal and the South East Asia on the other.

Details of ships laden with goods came to these two ports in Tamilnad, bringing products of their countries and perhaps from China were recorded in the port town. While speaking of Kadaram (the modern Keddah) probably included ships from Takuapa and Nakorn Sri Tammarat in Thailand. Later Tamil inscriptions of 13th century refers to “Sonaka” and “Sinika”. While *Sonaka* is clearly from China, the *Sonaka* is mistaken for Muslims. But it is not unlikely that it refers to Sornaka i.e., the people of Suvarna-bhumi identical with Thailand, as known then. As Takuapa in the west of Thailand, was an important port, which is nearer to Bengaladesa, it might have been the first port of call, enroute to the eastern ports of Kalinga, followed by the ports of the Andhras and the Cholas and the Pandyas. The Chinese traders might come to the Gulf of Thailand, through land route to “*Pratam Patom*” from there they could have reached, Takuapa and proceeded to Bengal before proceeding to Kalinga and then to Andhra desa and Tamilnad. Bengal ought to have played an important role in trade between India and South-east Asia. The contact Tamilnadu had with Bengal need to be studied in this light. We have seen that a poet named “Vanganar” as composer of poems in Sangam age is proof enough to indicate, there were colonies of Bengales and South-east Asians in Tondi, Pumpuhar and Nagapattinam of Tamilnadu.

Silappadikāram:

In the famous Tamil dramatic treatise – *Silappadikāram*, it is mentioned that the capital city of Madurai, celebrated the festival of cupid (*Kāman-pandikai*) in the month of April when people were expecting the arrival of ships from “Vangam”, bringing varieties of products of fragrances, perfumes, silk cloth, scented sticks, etc. These arrived at the port of Tondi, South of Madurai and brought them to the capital by the chieftains of Tondi. Some were meant for the Pāndya king as tributes. It is said that the ships laden with these products were brought by sea. These ships were navigated by the north eastern monsoon. Among the products there were as many as 36 varieties of silken cloths including *Kādakam* (Kadāram), along with red silk, yellow silk, fine silk, cotton fabrics, woven with artistic threads, forehead *pattu*, silk with designs with golden laces (*pon eluttu*), and silk from Gujarat (*Kuccari*, *Tewāngu*, and Devagiri silks), white shawls, red shawls, and the like. Other fragrant material included *Akil – āram*, and camphor that deserve to be mentioned – one was called *Takkoli* and the other *Kidāraavan*. It is possible *Takkoli* originated from Takuapa (originally called *Talai Takkolam* and the *Kidāraavan* originated from Kadāram.

It is not unlikely the ships, carrying these products, specifically said to come through the sea, brought in ships and boats, navigated by mat sails (*Pāy-marak-kappal*). They sailed from the region of Takuapa, all along skirting the coast of Bengal, Orissa, Andhra, and reached Tamilnadu, selling and picking up commodities after downloading at the ports of Tamilnadu, proceeded to Srilanka and returned later through the same route, bringing products from Ealam (Jaffna), as products of Ilams are also mentioned in some Tamil works.

The *Silappadikāram* is dated to the end of first – or beginning of 2nd century CE, and provides the evidence of continuous trade, between Tamilnadu and Taku-pa region, (*Silappadikāram – urkan kadai*, lines (106 to 112). The list is mentioned as “*tokai*” – meaning collection in the text. The early commentators, Arumpada urai ācīriyar (10th CE) mention them as collection, while the later 13th century Commentator Adiyarkkunallār, give the complete list of silk products and other fragrant materials. The foot note of U.V. Swaminathan Iyer says, most of the names in the list are in archaic Tamil, the exact meanings of which are not known). That points to the use of these names in the remote past).

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| 1. Tuhil | 19. Cuittikai |
| 2. Kocikam | 20. Turikai |
| 3. Pitakam | 21. Pangam |
| 4. Paccilar | 22. Tuttiyam |
| 5. Arattam | 23. Vannakai |
| 6. Nun Tuhil | 24. Kavarrummadi |
| 7. Cunnatu | 25. Nulyappu |
| 8. Vadakam | 26. Thirukku |
| 9. Pancu | 27. Tevanku |
| 10. Irattu | 28. Poncluttu |
| 11. Patakam | 29. Kuccari |
| 12. Kongalar | 30. Devagiri |
| 13. Kopam | 31. Kattulam |
| 14. Cittrakampu | 32. Iranci |
| 15. Kivutikariyal | 33. Venpattu |
| 16. Patakam | 34. Compotti |
| 17. Vetaugakara | 35. Paripatti |
| 18. Punk Kazakam | 36. Pariyakam |

Takuapa:

A Tamil stone inscription from Takuapa mentions three important places (1) Nangur, (2) Manigrāmam, (3) Senāmukha, and (4) some-what damaged mentions Tāpatas from Tamilnadu. Nāngur is near Kaveri-pum-pattinam, the famous ancient port at the mouth of the river Kāveri. Kaveri-pum-pattinam was an emporium mentioned by Ptolemy. This was the port town discussed in *Silappadikāram* as the capital of the Cholas of the Sangam age (1st century BCE to 2nd century CE). There is a classical description of this port in that text. It was well protected for foreign traders. The entry points of these ports were well guarded by *Yavanas*, with terrifying looks. The *Yavanas* are identified with “Sonakar” by the 10th century commentator

whose commentary is very brief, but the 13th century commentator, Adiyārkkū-nallār, says that they were “*Mlecchas*” who were at the entry points at the sea shore, I have suggested it might be Sonakar from *Suvarna dvipa*. No one could escape their sharp, searching and terrifying eyes. This seems to indicate Cholas had efficient battalion of security, at the shores, as it was visited by people of different countries whose safety was taken care off. The text next mentions men who came by ships called “*Pulam peyar mākkal*”. The early commentator calls them “*Kadal-odikal*”, who was sea farers from various countries, who had their colonies by the side of the shores. The later commentator Adiyarkku-nallār says, those who come by wooden ships, were very rich through trade, especially with the products brought from their countries. They spoke different languages and lived as one group in the economically prosperous places, evidently, those who brought merchandise had their settlements on the sea shore called “Sea shore colonies on the wavy shores”, and their wealth as “given by the ships”. They were also called “*Paradesis*” migrated from “foreign countries”. There is also a suggestion that they had special trading streets where *Ahil*, *Tuhil* (silk), Camphor and other fragrant materials were sold.

Then the *Silappadikaram* goes on to describe other colonies and streets in the town of honest traders, resulted in the popularity of Pumpuhar. Thus it has provided an international environment, that attracted.

As mentioned earlier, Nāngur the place mentioned in Takuapa inscription, was near Kaveri-pum-pattinam, the sailors ought to have embarked on their journey to Takuapa and Kadāram from Pumpuhar. It is important to mention, a similar colony ought to have existed at Takuapa, where the Tamil traders might have settled and continued to trade in other parts nearby.

Another point of interest is the name Kaveri-pum-pattinam was originally called “*Campā-pati*”. According to the early Tamil text, *Manimekhalai*, the name “*Campā-pati*” was later changed into Kāveri-pum-pattinam. A legend mentioned in that text, says Saint Agastya was there, when the river Kāveri come through the Chola land, to join the sea here. He renamed this port as, “Kaveri-pum-pattinam”. We are aware that, people from Taminadu had migrated to Srivijaya (Sumatra), Malay peninsula, Thāiland, Cambodia and to modern Vietnam and in all these places, Agastya and Kaundinya and Campā became popular.

Takuapa and Nakorn Sri Thammarat:

The Takuapa inscription is in Tamil language and script and was assigned to 9th century to the time of Nandivarman Pallava III, when the inscription was discovered because of the name *Avani-nāranam*, given to the tank dug for a temple there. The Pallava king Nandi III, the conqueror of Tellāru, had the title “*Avani-nāranan*” and hence the suggestion. But in a book on Uttaramerur, published by Francoise Gros and myself, in French, 1970, we have mentioned that the title “*Avani-nāranan*” was assumed by an earlier Pallava, Nandi II, in the 8th century. The Nandi II ruled between 732 to 797, while Nandi III ruled later (835 - 850).

The title Avani-nāranan is seen for Nandi 750 CE. The Takuapa inscription (Paleographically also) is early and is to be assigned to mid-8th century, a century earlier than what has been assigned so far.

A place named Sirkazhi the birth place of Saint Sambandar, who lived in the middle of 7th century CE. refers in his *Tevāram* songs to Vangam (Bengal) in a number of poems. In the poems on Thiru-cāy-kādu, Sambandar sings, Cāy-kādu where the sea waves wafted conch shells, pearls and gems on the shores. Cāy-kādu is about two miles inland from Kaveri-pum-pattinam. He also calls a temple of Siva probably built by a Pallava, named “*Pallavan-Isvaram*”, at Pattanam i.e., Kāveri-pum-pattanam. Sambandar calls it Pattinam which means, according to *Vāstu sastras*, a port town.

The port of Talai Takkolam (Ta-ku-apa) in the west coast has been an important place, that played a crucial role in the contact between South India and South-east Asia, from 2nd -1st century CE. Sastri has argued the role of this port in early historical period, from the find of a Greco Roman lamp, found in the region, now preserved in Bangkok museum. The *Silappadikaram* has shown, the port of Pumpuhār (another name of Kāveri-pum-pattanam) had adequate security for the foreign traders, with first position guarded by well trained *Yavanas* near the sea shore, and immediately behind, the merchants colony from foreign countries, speaking different languages. The 8th century Tamil inscription of Nandi Pallava age, has shown that Takuapa had a similar set up with the *Senamukha* and on the coast of Takuapa with the traders, *Mani-grāmamattārs* of gems.

Sastri, based on the findings of Coedes, has also noted on the land route from Ta-ku-apa to Nakorn Sri Tammarat” (Dharma-rāja) has yielded many Buddhist, and Hindu settlements, records with South Indian scripts and also Tamil inscriptions. It is also known the name Nakorn Tammarat, itself suggests it was a merchant Town – Nagaram in Chola times was used for a merchant town. It is the name “*Alakesvara*” also, that suggests the name of Alakāpuri, the capital of Kubera, the lord of wealth. We find in Tamilnadu, the rich merchants lived a few meters in interior towns connected with the trade as in the case of Sirkali from Kaveri-pum-pattinam. The place from where the donor, who dug the tank, as an adjunct to the Vishnu temple at Takuapa, hailed from Nāngur which is near the port of Kāveri-pum-pattinam. We may not be wrong in suggesting that there existed a permanent Tamil colony at Ta-ku-apa, as the tank was placed under the protection *Manigramattar* and *Senāmukha*. Such trusts could be entrusted only in the hands of permanent settlers and not under floating population. The frequent references to the silk cloth as Kādakam, suggests that all silk products, coming from China also were called after Kadagam, besides silk, perfumes, fragrant material. Even cotton fabrics, mentioned as “*Pancu*” also came along with (textiles) popular both at Kaveri-pum-pattinam, capital of the Cholas and Madurai of the Pāndyas. One of the fabrics was also named after Devagiri named as *Deagiri*, obviously from the Andhra coast. The ships coming to Tamilnad (and also from Srilanka) came also to Andhra coast and skirting the coast of Bengal.

Sastri has also shown that the term Kadāram might have extended, to the town Nakorm Thammarat.

Sambandar:

Jnanasambandar in the middle of 7th century CE, refers to Puhali and, of Sirkazhi near Kaveripumpattinam the world famous port called by western geographers as “Kabees emporium”. Pattinam is a technical term for a coastal port town, where sea farers visit for business, bringing commodities and sell them for exchange. It is celebrated in ancient literature as a port where foreign traders visit for trade. It is also said that it consisted of colonies of speakers of foreign languages residing there on the coastal regions. Saint Jnanasambandar has one hymn of *Tevaram*, consisting of ten verses in which he sings this port town it had a fortified town with lofty palaces inside (Purisai pattinam) are seen on the wavy ocean of Pumpuhar.

It is important to mention that a great group of cultivators, migrated from Bengal to Kalinga, Andhra, Tamilnadu and also to western part of Deccan. They were called the 48000 – (Narpatti-ennayiraver). They called themselves “*Gangakula*” in all these places. It is evident, Bengal, with its alluvial plain, was the abode of Paddy cultivation and their expertise in the field made the Deccan rulers like Tamil Cholas, Pandyas and Ceras to invite them to settle in their Kingdoms. A very famous minister to a Chola King of 12th Century, who wrote the brilliant text on 63 Shaiva saints, had the title “*Ganga Kula Tilaka*”. His family had six branches, who came to northern part of Tondaimandalam, and settled in villages around Kanchipuram. The Goddess Kamakshi of Kanchipuram, gifted to them 8 measures of paddy seed with which they developed paddy cultivation there. Then they went to Kaveri region where also they developed agriculture, especially paddy and sugarcane. So they identified the river Kaveri with Ganga which suggests the purity and fertilizing properties. A Vaishnavite Alvar goes a step further and says Kaveri was purer than Ganga, a poetic way of mentioning its sanctity.

I have shown early that in the field of temple worship, music and philosophy there has been close contact between Tamilnadu and Bengal. The great Advaita exponent Sankaracharya was a disciple of Gaudapada Acharya.

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