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An Investigative Study of Trade relations between Sri Lanka and South India mentioned in Tamil inscriptions of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

According to Tamil inscriptions in Sri Lanka, we can get to know some information on trade relations between Sri Lanka and South India. In this study, the information on the trade relations between Sri Lanka and South India in the Tamil inscriptions found in Sri Lanka is studied investigative. This study was conducted under the research problem of, what information is contained in Sri Lankan Tamil inscriptions about the trade relationship between Sri Lanka and South India. And this aimed to obtain information on the economic connection between Sri Lanka and South India through Tamil inscriptions found in Sri Lanka. This whole research depends on the readings of Tamil inscriptions found in Sri Lanka. Hence, this could be categorized as desktop research and conducted as qualitative research. To collect data, I used library and museum studies under the secondary data collection method and later analyzed them. In this study, I got data from Tamil inscriptions found in the Anuradhapura, Kalutara, and Kurunegala districts and, the Sinhala inscription of Queen Lilawathi. Those inscriptions mention some South Indian trade corporations, that have been involved in foreign trade in Sri Lanka such as Ainnurruvar, and Nanadeshi. Weerakoti and Nanadeshi, which can be trusted as Ainnurruvar trade corporation and its affiliates, also appear to have been involved in foreign trade. The inscriptions state that the trading companies built and sponsored Buddhist and Hindu temples in the country. There were trade cities in Sri Lanka that were associated with trade corporations in Real-time and also tax collection was associated with those corporations. It can be concluded that during the Polonnaruwa period, South Indian trade corporations were active in Sri Lanka and Sri Lanka remained an economic hub.

Keywords: Tamil inscriptions, trade relations, Sri Lanka, South India, trade corporation

Introduction

The inscriptions play an important role in confirming the facts mentioned in the literary sources. And also, they are extremely important for the study of certain contemporary information not found in literary sources. Tamil Epigraphs found in Sri Lanka date back to pre-Christian times to the modern era and most of the Tamil inscriptions found in Sri Lanka from the Anuradhapura period date back to the 10th century AD.

Most of the Tamil inscriptions found in Sri Lanka mention various donations. Information in those inscriptions can be divided into four main categories such as economic, religious, social, and political. Among these, economic information is very important, because they include information about trade relations between Sri Lanka and other countries in the world. According to chronicles like Mahavamsa, since the pre-Christian period Sri Lankan economy has been maintained systematically. There is also literary and archaeological evidence that Sri Lanka has been used as a major trading center in the Indian Ocean since pre-Christian times. Sri Lanka had trade relationships with India, China, Arabs, Persia, Greece, Rome, Myanmar, etc. The Mahavamsa mentions that Kuveni captured the merchants who came by ship as "...rice and other (foods) and goods of every kind that had been in the ships of those traders whom she had devoured" (Mahavamsa, 1912, p.57). As this text, it seems that foreign trade existed in Sri Lanka even in the 6th century BC. Also, the fact that internationally renowned ports such as Matota and Gokanna have covered all the coasts of Sri Lanka since ancient times, is evidence that Sri Lanka's foreign trade was in a good situation.

According to sources Sri Lanka and India had a great trade relationship. Also, according to Tamil inscriptions in Sri Lanka, we can get to know some information about trade relations between Sri Lanka and South India. In this study, the information on the trade relations between Sri Lanka and South India in the Tamil inscriptions found in Sri Lanka is studied investigative.

Inscriptions are often written at the same time, so Historians and Archaeologists are confident in the accuracy of the information they provide. This study was conducted under the research problem of, what information is contained in Sri Lankan Tamil inscriptions about the trade relationship between Sri Lanka and South India. And this research aimed to obtain information on the economic connection between Sri Lanka and South India through Tamil inscriptions found in Sri Lanka.

This whole research depends on the readings of Tamil inscriptions found in Sri Lanka. Hence, this could be categorized as desktop research and conducted as qualitative research. To collect data, I used library and museum studies under the secondary data collection method and later analyzed them. It was important to study the sources as the research was done based on inscriptions and it was done under two main sections. The first one was studying literature sources, and under it, I referred to the inscription's directory in the Department of Archaeology. To study the Tamil inscriptions, I used *Epigraphia Zeylanica* and *Inscriptions of Ceylon* volumes, published books, articles, and research papers by Prof. Senarath Paranavitana, Prof. A. Velupillai, Prof. S. Pathmanathan, and Prof. K. Kanapathipillai. Beside those main literary sources, I used reports, articles, and books by H.C.P. Bell, Prof. K. Indrapala, H.W. Codrington and E. Mullar. When collecting real-time data, I used primary sources such as *Mahavamsa*, *Rajavaliya*, and the *History of Ceylon* and secondary sources such as books, articles, research papers, and records about Tamil inscriptions in Sri Lanka. As archaeological sources, I referred to stamp pages of Tamil inscriptions in the Department of Archaeology. A museum study was conducted as a field study. I studied Tamil inscriptions at Colombo national museum.

For this study, I got data from Tamil inscriptions such as the Anuradhapura Nankunattar inscription, Vahalkada, Padaviya, Viharahinna, Kalutara, Budumuttawa, Galtempitiya, Detiyamulla, Ilakkattu Eba and Sinhala inscription of Queen Lilawathi.

As data, I got from inscriptions and other literary sources, I got to know about some trade corporations. Other countries, especially South Indian trade corporations, have been involved in foreign trade in Sri Lanka. According to Tamil inscriptions, it seems that such trade corporations existed from the Anuradhapura period. The earliest Tamil inscription found from Anuradhapura mentions the construction of a Buddhist temple by a South Indian trade rank named 'Nankunattar', and according to it we can understand, from the 9th century AD, the South Indian trade ranks had direct links with Sri Lanka (ඉන්දික, 2014, පි.335). And that inscription mentions these merchants donated a lamp for Lord Buddha beside building this temple. Also, they did those things in the name of some Tamil people in their country who faced something dangerous.

314 epigraphs found from South India, Sri Lanka, and southeast Asia refer to the South Indian trade ranks (ඉන්දික, 2014, පි.336). Among those trade ranks, the main trade ranks were 'Aiññūruvar' which is also known as 'Aiyavole', 'Thisaiyairattu ainnurruvar', and 'Nanathesiya thisaiyairattu ainnurruvar', 'Nanadesi' trade corporation which also known as 'Veera Valanciar' and 'Nanatheciar' and also sometimes known as aiññūruvar, trade corporation named 'Manigramam' or 'Wanikgramam' and trade corporation named 'Nakarattar' (Indrapala, 1971, pp.102,103).

The Tamil inscriptions situated by trade rank named Walangiar, Balangiar, Balangi, Banagiya, or Baliga that had branches all over South Asia, found from Wahalkada, Padaviya, a village near Hettipola, Moragolla in Matale District, Anavilundawa in Polonnaruwa and they have given a contingent of troops to the Velaikkara army (ලංඉ., 1972, පි.523). A Slab inscription of Queen Leelawathi from the Polonnaruwa period mentions 'Nanadeshi Viyaparan', a trade corporation formed by various countries (EZ., 1912, p.179).

Aiññūruvar was a powerful trading corporation that later expanded throughout South Asia and South East Asia (Wijetunga, 1966, p.494). And according to Prof. Velupillai, in the middle age, there was a trading corporation named

‘Ticaiyāyirattu aiññūrruvar’ in India and Sri Lanka (Veluppillai, 1971, p.44). Before the expansion of Chola power in India, the corporation spread across the Indian subcontinent and later spread throughout South Asia using their naval power under the auspices of the Chola kingdoms (Veluppillai, 1971, pp.46,47). Inscriptions that mention this corporation have been found in South India, Thailand, China, Indonesia, and Myanmar (Indrapala, 1971, pp.102,103). Prof. Veluppillai translated it to English and known as ‘The five hundred of thousand directions’ corporation, and it was abbreviated as ‘The five hundred’ (Aiññūrruvar) (Veluppillai, 1971, p.44). The inscription from Kalutara mentions this corporation. And according to the inscription we can assume, the Kali temple in Kalutara was built by this corporation. *Parevi Sandeshaya* also mentions this Kali temple by asserting to the pigeon to cross the Bentota, and sleep in Kali Kovil. (පටංකවිජය.68).

Inscriptions found from Budumuttawa, Gitempitiya and Detiyamulla mention a gang called ‘Weerakoti’. Also, they were mentioned in inscriptions that mention ‘Aiññūrruvar’ corporations like Vahalkada, Padaviya, and Viharahinna. According to Prof. Veluppillai, inscriptions from Rankot Viharaya in Polonnaruwa and other two inscriptions found from Padaviya also mention both ‘Weerakoti’ and ‘Aiññūrruvar’ (Veluppillai, 1971, pp.46-57; Veluppillai, 1972, pp.9-12,21). Besides them, these two names were found in inscriptions of Atharagalla and Anavilundawa according to Prof. Indrapala (Indrapala, 1971, p.105). According to Prof. Pathmanathan, the Detiyamulla inscription mentions an agreement between the municipal council and the Weerakoti trade corporation and also about a donation that they did for a Buddhist temple. Also, the Budumuttawa slab inscription mentions Weerakkoti and a Buddhist temple built by them.

Weerakoti was a collection of high-ranking members of society who maintained close ties with the ‘Nanadeshi’ traded corporation, and Prof. Veluppillai thinks that they may have been a military corporation or society (Pathmanathan, 1994, p.25). ‘Weerar’ and ‘Weera-kodiyar’ words were used to describe an army of a trade rank in inscriptions (ඉන්දික, 2014, පි.336). Although several inscriptions on Weerakoti have been found in Sri Lanka, this was not a well-known trading company in South India

at that time (Indrapala,1971, p.105). According to Prof. Pathmanathan, about 20 inscriptions referring to ‘Nanadeshi’ have been found and all except the inscription of Queen Lilawathi and the Anavilundawa inscription have been made in Tamil (ඉන්දික,2014,පි.336).

The Budumuttawa inscription mentions ‘ainnurruvan pattanam’. ‘Pattanam’ means both city and port, so it is often referred to as a port city owned by the ainnurruvar corporation. It is also possible that there was an army to provide security for the city, as the inscription mentioned that an army paid a fee. This inscription mentions a port city located in the Magala area of Nikaweratiya (Pathmanathan,1994, p.20). And it mentions the Goddess Parameshwari as Nanadeshi’s Godmother. The Nainativu Tamil inscription, founded by King Parakramabahu I, a status that due protection was given to the merchants who roamed the ports of the country (Rasanayagam,1926, p.208). Because of Budumuttawa inscription belongs to Polonnaruwa Period, that same rule should be applied in real-time. Therefore, that army must be Weerakoti.

In the Detiyamulla inscription, there is the word ‘cāyar’, which conveys the idea of ‘Collector of money due, so it must be about a tax collector. This inscription belongs to the 12th or 13th centuries AD. Taxes have been the main sources of revenue for the Royal treasury during this period. And Queen Lilawathi’s inscription mentions tax collected on merchandise near the gate of Anuradhapura town. Since the Detiyamulla inscription mentions a port city, taxes may have been levied on it as well.

Inscriptions found in the North Western Province about these trade corporations date to the 12th and 13th centuries AD. Also, inscriptions from Viharahinna, Padaviya, and Vahalkada belong to the same period (Velupillai,1971, p.46). Weerakoti and Nanadeshi, which can be trusted as Ainnurruvar trade corporation and its affiliates, also appear to have been involved in foreign trade in Sri Lanka. Since all these trade corporations are of South Indian origin, it can be assumed that Sri Lanka had a close trade relationship with South India.

The inscriptions state that the above-mentioned trading companies built and sponsored Buddhist and Hindu places of worship in the country. Accordingly, it appears that a group of foreign Tamil origin sponsored Buddhism in this country. The specialty here is the sponsorship of Buddhist temples by a trade corporation at a time when the South Indian invasion was rampant in the country. Therefore, it can be believed that they were not a group that aimed to invade Sri Lanka, but a group that respected Buddhism. And Ainnurruvar must be a strong and wide trade corporation in South Asia.

It can be identified that there were trade cities in Sri Lanka that were associated with trade corporations at Real-time. Weerakoti, a military trade class, has provided security to the trade cities. Weerakoti is referred to as a collection of high-ranking members of the society, so it is possible that their trade corporation existed as a company with shareholders as it exists today.

Although the inscriptions do not describe what the merchandise was, it is believed that the import and export functions were carried out by these trade corporations, such as gems. Inscriptions established by these corporations are found in various parts of Sri Lanka and it seems that these trade corporations may have been active in those areas. It also appears that tax collection was associated with trade corporations.

From the above, it can be concluded that the merchants mentioned in the inscription from Nainativu must be Weerakoti, and it must be an army of a trade rank and also a merchant group with shareholders, who made donations for Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it can be believed that they respected Buddhism. And there was a Kali temple in Kalutara, built by a South Indian trade corporation named Ainnurruvar, and it was owned ports and cities in Sri Lanka. And they may have levied taxes on ports also.

Finally, it can be assumed during the Polonnaruwa period, the most famous and wealthy South Indian trade corporations were active in Sri Lanka and Sri Lanka

remained an important economic hub in South Asia. Also, Sri Lankan trade may have been controlled to some extent by these trade corporations.

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