



TELUGU INSCRIPTIONS OF MADURAI NAYAKAS IN TAMIL NADU

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Abstract

MaduraiNayakas were the Telugu rulers from around 1529 CE until 1736 CE comprising most of the modern-day Tamil Nadu, with Madurai as their capital. The Nayaka's reign was noted for its achievements in arts, cultural and administrative reforms, revitalization of temples previously ransacked by the Delhi Sultanate, and inauguration of a unique architectural style. The dynasty consisted of 13 rulers (9 kings, 2 queens, and 2 joint kings).¹ The most noticeable of these were Viswanatha Nayaka, Tirumala Nayaka, and Rani Mangammal. An attempt is made in this paper to discuss the significant observations made on the 22 Telugu inscriptions issued by the Madurai Nayakas in Tamilnadu in chronological order.

Keywords: Telugu Rulers, Inscriptions, Poligar System, Annadana Satra, Temples, Mathas.

Introduction

Hundreds of inscriptions on stone and metal belonging to the Madurai Nayakas are published so far. These inscriptions are in Tamil, Sanskrit, Kannada and Telugu languages. Of all, 26 inscriptions are in Telugu from different parts of Southern India. Below are the 22 Telugu inscriptions that are found in Tamilnadu. All these inscriptions describe the activities of the rulers and address the measures taken for religious harmony, their charitable contributions, and many more other social and cultural activities. The administrative strategies followed by these vassal chiefs are discussed in detail. The inscriptions that speak volumes about the welfare activities, tours of these rulers to understand the local life, extension of territories, free education, poligar system, caste system, decentralized administration, inscriptions issued by women etc are studied in detail.

List of Telugu inscriptions issued by the Nayakas of Madurai in Tamilnadu

S.No	Name of the Ruler	No. of inscriptions
1	Kondama Nayaka	1
2	Virappa Nayaka	1
3	Vishvanatha Nayaka	1
4	Tirumala Nayaka	1
5	Chokkanatha Nayaka	2
6	Muttu Virappa Nayaka	1
7	Muttu Alagiri Nayaka	1
8	Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayaka	1
9	Rani Mangammal	7
10	RangaKrishna MuttuVirappa Nayaka	1
11	Vijaya Ranga Chokkanatha Nayaka	4
12	Meenakshi	1
	Total	22

Inscriptions

The earliest Telugu inscription mentioning the Nayakas of Madurai is found from Chidambaram, South Arcot district during the reign of Srirangaraya ruling from Penukonda. This inscription is dated to 1582 CE and records that Kondamanayani son of Krishnappanayani remitted the *jodi* and *virada* in 38 villages of the temple in Bhonagiripatnam *sima*.² Another inscription dated to 1584 CE from Madurai



records the construction of the *Kambattadi mandapa* in the Sundaresvara temple, with a number of sculptured pillars representing *puranic* scenes in the reign of Virappa Nayaka.³The Vellangudi inscription of Vira Venkatapatiraya dated to 1613 CE registers that a certain Venkatadri Bhattar, the son of Timmarasa, set up the images of Krishna and Kamesvari, and granted land for their worship. The country was directly under the rule of Virappa Nayaka and the land granted had been obtained as a grant from Viswanatha Nayaka.

The Kannadiputtur inscription (Udumalpet, Coimbatore) of Tirumala Nayaka records his grant of lands to a Brahman in the reign of Srirangaraya in 1655 CE.⁵ The Tinnevelley grant records the land grant in the villages of Tirumalasamudram and Pudukkulam to a brahman by Sri Ranga Krishna Muttu Virappa Nayaka, son of Chokkanatha Nayaka in 1657 CE.⁶When Srirangaraya was ruling from Ghanagiri, in 1662 CE Chokkanatha Nayaka made a grant to the temple priest at Srirangam. This inscription is peculiar that it was made for the well being of the priest to attain religious merit. The date of the inscription is mentioned in both *Saka* and *Kaliyuga* eras i.e., *saka*1584 and *Kaliyuga* 4763 respectively.⁷The Kumaralingam inscription of Chokkanatha Nayaka records the grant of land to a brahmana in the village of Kumaralingam, Udumalpet, Coimbatore in 1667 CE. This donation is made in the reign of Srirangaraya of Vijayanagara empire.⁸ Donation of the village Krishnapuram in Madurai to a brahmana by Muddu Alagiri Nayudu (Muttu Alagiri Nayaka), son of Muttu Virappa Nayaka in the reign of Srirangaraya III in 1678 CE.⁹ An interesting inscription comes from Tinnevelley which records the grant to a *musalman* for the maintenance of a mosque, during the reign of the sovereign Srirangaraya III ruling at Kanakagiri, by Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayaka.¹⁰

Rani Mangammal, who ruled as a regent played a significant role in consolidating the throne after the demise of her husband Chokkanatha Nayaka. Many Tamil and Telugu inscriptions speak about her involvement in revolutionary strategies and her generous donations to various temples of South India. It is to be noted that the donations were made not only to the temples but also to the religious and educational institutions like *mathas* and *annadana satras* to impart education and Vedic practices. The donation of certain villages to a *darga* at Trichinopoly stands as a testimony of religious harmony and helps one to understand that the royal gates were open to the people of all religions. The following is the list of Telugu inscriptions issued by Mangammal to different institutions and individuals on different occasions.

S. No	Year	Place	Details of the inscription
1	1691 CE	----	Grant of land to a Brahmana ¹¹
2	1692 CE	Srirangam	Gift of land to a brahmana. ¹²
3	1700 CE	Madurai	Gift of the village Balakrishna Mahadanapuram to certain brahmanas ¹³
4	1701 CE	Madurai	Gift of land to Subbayya Bhagavatha for <i>annadana satra</i> . ¹⁴
5	1701 CE	Trichinopoly	Gifts of some villages to the <i>daraga</i> of Babanatta. ¹⁵
6	1704 CE	Tanjavuru	Records the construction of a surplus sluice at Uyyakkondan channel. ¹⁶
7	1706 CE	Tinnevelley	Grant of a land during the reign of Venkatadevaraya at Ghangiri. ¹⁷

Ranga Krishna Muttu Virappa Nayaka, is mentioned in a Telugu inscription belonging to 1700 CE. He made a donation to a *Siva* temple in Tinnevelley. This donation is said to be made in the reign of Narasimhadeva ruling from Ghanagiri.¹⁸The Jambukeswaram (Gajaranyakshetra) inscription records the



grant of lands by Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayaka, son of Ranga Krishna Muttu Virappa Nayaka for the maintenance of worship and feeding of brahmanas at Sankaracharya *matha*. Two inscriptions from Srirangam and Trichinopoly dated to 1716 CE¹⁹ and 1721 CE records grants of land for charity by the same king. A certain Narasa Nayaka, who offered prayers to Dhanvantari is said to be the donee of the latter inscription.²⁰ During the reign of Mahadevaraya ruling from Ghanagiri in 1724 CE Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayaka granted village in Tinnevely in charity.²¹ The rulers of this dynasty made several donations in charity and encouraged many private individuals to come forward in the respected areas with their contributions.

The last Telugu inscription belonging to the Madurai Nayaka family is issued by Meenakshi, the widow of Vijayaranga Chokkanatha in 1733 CE. The inscription records the grant of land for a charitable object at the Trichinopoly fort gate.²²

Conclusion

To conclude, the inscriptions that are discussed in the present paper give interesting facts about the Nayakas of Madurai. The religious harmony towards minorities, donations made to the individuals for their economic and social well being as well the donations made to the religious and educational institutions make this study more interesting. Most importantly, though the Madurai Nayakas were not the descendents of the Tamil country, they succeeded in retaining the tradition and glory of the Tamil land without meddling with the existing culture and made modifications wherever and whenever necessary.

References

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