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## LAND OWNERSHIP AND TAXATION UNDER KONGU CHOLAS: GLEANED FROM INSCRIPTIONS

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the pastoral economy, land ownership and taxation methods of Medieval Kongu Nadu under the Kongu Cholas based on epigraphical sources. It goes over the region's transactional phase from nomadic pastoral society to an organised agri based economy. This paper details the land tenure system which includes Mannarai (crown lands), Brahmadeyam (tax free lands gifted to brahmins), Devadhana (lands to the temple), service tenure, and the existence of private and communal ownership. Moreover it prioritizes distinctive administrative concepts such as Kaniyatchi and Manrattu. This paper also demarcates the government's revenue channel, noting the tax is like Kadamai, were implemented based on the fertility of the soil, the land tenure and it was collected in cash or kind. This paper showcases a self sufficient and affluent medieval Kongu economy, supported by land recoupmnt, organised trade guilds and trade connections.*

**KEYWORDS:** Land Ownership, Mannarai, Brahmadeyam, Devadhana, Kaniyatchi, Manrattu, Kadamai.



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## INTRODUCTION

The Kongu country is one of the earliest territorial divisions of the ancient home of the Tamils. Scholar explains the meaning of the word 'Kongu'. K. V. Subramania Aiyer argues that the name 'Kongu' had its origin from territory. Subbarayalu opines that a Ganga king by name *Kongunivarman* ruled over Kongu Country, hence Kongu' after him. Kongu country it mainly noted as Mullai land but also has an admixture of Kurinji (Vanpulam) and Marudham (Menpulam). At the outset, the peasants and tribes were mainly focused on mountain cultivation, food gathering and hunting. As regards the *mullai* tract, the herder community, *Ayar* or *Kovalar* were mainly concerned with cattle keeping, while *Vanpulam* cultivation shows the distribution of food and forage to the cattle. Meanwhile, not only by the people of the *Marutam* zone, which had the fertile land (*Menpulam*) but also wherever the condition of soil and other factors permit, is also a best suited for cultivation. From available source material, it is inferred that some people worked in the state as officials. However, agriculture was the main occupation of the people. This paper traces the varieties of land ownerships and taxation in the Kongu country under the Kongu Cholas based on inscriptional sources.

## LAND OWNERSHIP

Land was the free gift of nature occupies a pre- eminent position in the economy of the country and has always been the chief source of wealth. The acquisitions of fertile lands were remarked as high social value and the clans were noted as *Vellalars*. Numberless instances of alienation by sale or gift of the inheritance of soil by individuals, and of the inheritance of such property from father to son in the normal course, can be gathered from inscriptions. Land was primary importance in the medieval period. The official documents speak of a bewildering variety of land ownership<sup>i</sup>. The inscriptions of the *Viracholeswaran* temple are helpful in knowing the various kinds of land ownerships in *Sangaramanallur* and its surroundings. The inscriptions refer to *Mannarai*, *Brahmadeya lands*, *Devadana* lands, service tenure, communal ownership and private land ownership<sup>ii</sup>.

## MANNARAI OR CROWN LANDS

*Mannarai* can be split into two syllables Man- aria. It is therefore from these two terms that these crown lands were fertile ones and held by kings. The inscriptional evidences go to show that mannarais were irrigated lands. The temple inscriptions mention that mannarai was named after the king, queen and god. There were *Cholamannarai*, *Adhirajaraja Mannarai*<sup>iii</sup>, *Viranarayana mannarai*<sup>iv</sup>, *Virachola mannarai*<sup>v</sup>, *Virarajendra Mannarai*<sup>vi</sup>, *Kulothunga Chola Mannarai*<sup>vii</sup>, *Adisaya Chola mannaria*<sup>viii</sup>, *Jayakonda Chola mukkokilanadigal mannarai*<sup>ix</sup>, *Alundaiyar Nachiar Mannarai*<sup>x</sup>, *Sivapatha Sekara Mannarai*<sup>xi</sup>, etc. It is learnt from the temple inscriptions that the kings mostly donated lands from these mannarai to the temples. For instance Chola king Virachola Deva II's crown land in *Virakerala Valanadu* were known as *Virakerala Mannarai*<sup>xii</sup>. Hence fertile tracts belonged to kings or temples.

In some cases assembly or Brahmadeya Sabha were empowered to gift away lands taken from mannarai lands. The gifts of land from Mannarai were a tax free. In this context *Irai*, *Puravu*, *Siddhayam*, *Eluvai* and *Uvagai* were mentioned as taxes when tax free land was gifted. However, a very few inscriptions from Komaralingam, Piramiyam, Periyapalayam and Tingalur refer to *Kadamai*. Therefore it may be safely concluded that *Kadamai* was not given up by kings while tax free land was granted.

## BRAHMADEYA LANDS

These lands donated to the Brahmins were brahmadeya lands. Usually these lands were exempted from tax. Brahmadeya lands were not to be sold. The Brahmin settlements were called *Chaturvedimangalam*. Brahmins well-versed in four Vedas lived. One of the inscriptions at Vira Choleswarar temple recorded a gift land in *Viranarayana Chadurvedimangalam* as brahmadeya in *Vaikavi Nadu*. One of the boundaries of the land was stated to *Cheranaimarkonda Cholan Peruvazhi*<sup>xiii</sup>. The donor of this Chaturvedimangalam and Brahmadeya was the king Vira Choladeva, the builder of the *Vira Chola Iswaramudaiyar* temple at *Kolumum*.

Mostly the waste lands of the forest lands were given as brahmadeyas in order to change the uncultivated lands to cultivated ones, and to make the area a civilized one. They were handed over to the Brahmins forever. It was known as *Sarvamanya* tenure<sup>xiv</sup>.

## DEVADANA LANDS

*Devadana* lands were held by temples to which they have been gifted<sup>xv</sup>. These lands were managed by the authorities of the temple subject to supervision and control of the village assembly on the one side and the central government on the other. It was open to the authorities of the temple acting in concert with the local assemblies to award *jivita kanis* to the servants of the temple as remuneration for the performance of services or the supply of articles requires for use in the temple<sup>xvi</sup>.

Two terms *Kudininga* and *Kudinikkiya*<sup>xvii</sup> appear in the inscriptions dealing with the grant on alienation of land. When the land grant was made to a temple, if the previous cultivators of the land and their rights were allowed to continue, this tenure was referred to as *Kudininga devdanam*. If the previous cultivators were removed from their services it is considered as *Kudinikkiya devadanam*.

## SERVICE TENURE

Service tenure was held by men in return for service. It was the custom during the medieval period that lands were given to military men, officers and temple servants for their services instead of paying them in cash. This was known as Service tenure.

Most of the lands were service tenure lands. Lands were granted as service tenure for *Manradi*, *Urali*, army chief, dancing girls<sup>xviii</sup>, temple servants<sup>xix</sup>, gold smiths, carpenter and iron smith<sup>xx</sup>. These service tenure lands sometimes were donated to the temple but only with the consent of the king. All the service tenures were tax free lands. At *Sangaramanallur* the royal officers, village administrators, the Siva Brahmins and the priests had ownership, as can be seen from various inscriptions.

## PRIVATE LAND OWNERSHIP

Kongu Chola inscriptions mention various boundaries which revealed the fact that there existed various private ownership of the land when agriculture was developed. From the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. onwards, a number of private lands came into existence<sup>xxi</sup>. Inscriptions mention *Uranmaikani*, *Manrattukkani*, *Puluvakkani*<sup>xxii</sup>, *Uvachakkani* etc. The king had the sole authority in issuing orders (*olai*) and conferring *Kaniyatchi* rights such as *Kudineeka kani*<sup>xxiii</sup>, *Nilakkani* and *Vaachiya kani*<sup>xxiv</sup>. For conferring these rights

the king collected *Pon* from the respective persons or social groups. For example, during the 13<sup>th</sup> regnal year of Virarajendra, a Brahmin purchased *Irailli* lands from the king for 30 Pon and got the *Kani* right<sup>xxv</sup>, a right to make the people to inhabit in it and enjoy the other privileges. Private ownership in land emerged in different times in different localities as brahmadeyam emerged in the eastern part of Kongu. The land holders treated their lands according to their own will and wish. No one could interfere in their land rights. If an owner was found guilty of treason, his lands were confiscated by the king. Again if a land was donated to the temple, neither the donor nor his descendants had any right over this land.

## COMMUNAL OWNERSHIP

An inscription from Sangaramanallur of Vira Chola II (1122 A.D.) says that land was owned by the entire clan. So clan ownership existed up to 14<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Land scale was village system, such as Vellala Urar or Vellalanatta and Puluva Urar or Puluva nattar<sup>xxvi</sup>. An inscription from Kolumam refers to periodical redistribution of land. According to this inscription sabha or Chaturvedhimangalam decided that the periodical registrations were given up from 1122 A.D.<sup>xxvii</sup>. Land shares which were distributed in that year were owned by the families for generations to come. The disinterest of the people to periodical distribution forced the assembly to take this decision. Peasants were also accustomed to periodical redistribution of land in villages.

## KANIYATCHI

Kongu inscriptions refer to the right of land ownership called Kaniyatchi (Kani-land-right). The word 'Kaniyatchi' denotes the proprietorship over the gifted land or the cultivable land. Apart from this right, Kaniyatchi bestowed other rights also. For example in the Sarkar periyapalayam inscription the Kaniyatchi holder is bestowed with the right to perform pooja, to settle devadana land, and had the authority to appoint manradi to collect tax dues. The right of Kaniyatchi was obtained from the king on payment of a fee. Some scholars hold the view that Kaniyatchi was a hereditary right. It is confirmed by the statement Nummakal anupavithu kolvarakalaka.

## LAND RECLAMATION

The reclamation of waste lands brought additional revenue to the state. Therefore many forests were brought under cultivation. The word "Ericil" means burning of forest. In the medieval Kongu the names of several village end with the prefix or suffix such as erieil polivayci, purrericil and Velliericil. Settled life among the hill people was confirmed by the inscriptions found in Bargur ranges. Most of the waste lands were brought under cultivation. The inscriptions at Komaralingam (Erode), Andiyur, Kuna<sup>xxviii</sup>thur, Kolumam, Kadathur and Konerinmain-kondan mention the Kadu (forest) lands were cleared to establish devadanas.

## MANRATTU

Kongu region was famous for its cattle-breeding. Chengam hero stones attest to the existence of cattle breeders even during the tenth century A.D. According to this a hero from Elumattur in Kongu sacrificed his life in a cattle raid. In a cattle-breeding society like Kongu, 'Manrattu and manradi' (cattle-keeper) stood for a cattle breeding culture. When later on the cattle breeding village was converted into an agricultural village the terms came to denote the milieu of cultivated lands. Tirumuruganpundi inscription

elucidates the term 'Manrattu' in an agricultural setup. Tirumuruganpoondi was divided into six manrattus by the order of the king. These manrattus were distributed to Thanathar.

Thus the newly created manrattu was given to one individuals by name Annamalayan who remitted two hundred pons for the renovation of Muruganpundi temple. **Aliyaviradam Kandakulam** village was divided into six manrattus. Wet land, dry land, trees, wells, rising crops and other income yielding lands of which one share went to Annamalayan and his descendants. Here Manrattu clearly means a 'share' in agricultural productions in manrattu thottam devadana lands. The term manrattu, Manradi, Manrattu Kani, Manrattu cey , Manrattu thottam , manrattu nilam had intimate

connections with manrattu. Two inscriptions from Tirumuruganpundi refer to six manrattus and five manrattus each. Annur inscription refers to five manrattus. The devadana palagaipulai was divided into eight manrattus and offered to the individuals. Another village is said to have been divided into several manrattus. Manrattu right was distributed to individuals. It is clear from the inscriptions that each manrattu was vested with one person. Inscriptions from Perur Kolumum, Solamadevi, Kannadiputtur and Avinashi clearly attest to this fact. But a record from Annur reveals the fact the one particular manrattu was given to five persons and two manrattus were given to another five persons. The individuals who received the manrattus, need not necessarily

be the natives of the same manrattu but they had to be the natives of the same Nadu.

Kings never relinquished their authority over manrattus. Manrattu is a share in the agricultural production. Though manrattus were located in devadana villages, the kings always had their power over their divisions and distributions. An inscription mentions the confiscation of 'Manrattu' from an individual who turned out to be a traitor. This fact shows the overall authority of the king on manrattus in devadana villages. Another inscription of Kolumum confirms this conclusion regarding manrattu. No temple authority or village assembly had any right over the manrattu system, only the kings in medieval kongu donated devadana.

Inscriptions show tie villages clearly mentioned in the distribution of 'manrattu'. There were occasions during which the manrattus were sold by kings to the individual as per the inscriptions found in Tirumuruganpundi and Solamadevi. The same inscriptions record tie fact that the kings granted manrattus to persons asking them to deposit money into the royal treasury.

Manrattu right was conferred upon individuals as a hereditary right. Most of the manrattus were received by elite groups and the higher echelons of the society. Velan, Muvenda velan, Officers, Brahmins, Vellala, Pula vis, temple authorities and traders were manradis who received manrattu in devadana villages. Since manrattu was sold by kings, only the wealthy people could get the manrattu rights.

## REVENUE AND TAXATION

The revenue of the government came from several items of taxation and dues. Social and communal taxes such as on land, profession, property, industries, trade and commerce, besides fines and dues constituted the sources of revenue, which were collected in cash or kind. Taxes were important and extensive. Some of the general terms for taxes found in my study of inscriptions are **irai, kadamai, vari** and **pattam**.

Before levying the taxes, certain factors such as the nature of the village, tenure of the land, the fertility of the soil and kind of crop grown therein were taken into consideration. The Chola inscriptions clearly mentions that 1/6th of the total produce was levied as land tax. Taxes on lands such as **Kadamai** were paid in kind while taxes on dry-lands were paid in cash and such collections were given to '**Puravuvariyar**'. Barrenlands were exempted from paying tax.

Tax-free lands were known as '**Iraiyili**'. Vikrama Choladeva granted a gift of land as **Iralyili** to — those who recited the Mahabharatha in villages. All the land-holders of the village paid taxes to the Government. Some of the taxes such as **Polivu**, **Porpu** and **Eluvai** were remitted to the temple in favour of the inhabitants living within the temple. A grant of **Iraiyili** was made after making necessary deductions from the revenue account. Lands were given as a gift to the institutions like temples by philanthropic persons. While purchasing the lands for such purposes, they paid the price of land as well as the taxes payable on it, which was known as tax remission.

## CONCLUSION

Careful study of the inscriptions and indigenious literature undertaken in this research yield interesting details, regarding the economic condition of the Kongu country during the medieval times. The people lived mostly in villages and town life attracted chiefly the aristocratic and commercial classes. The inscriptions of Vira Choleswaram temple give us a vivid account of the various kinds of land ownership such as crown lands, temple lands, brahmadeya lands, devadana lands, private lands and communal lands. The forest lands were changed into cultivable lands and new settlements were allotted to people to inhabit these villages. Manrattu, a hereditary right was introduced by the Kongu Cholas. Besides agriculture, varied trades and occupations of a fairly advanced society were in existence. Trades and crafts were usually hereditary. The principal traders were organized in guilds. The guild system was both professional and communal.

The Barter system was prevalent. Taxes were paid generally in kind and the grains were stored up in the royal granaries to be used in times of famine and for feeding armies. There was extensive and prosperous external trade with Kerala, Chola,

Pandya, Pallava and Ganga countries. Internal trade was equally vigorous and good and safe highways - **Nattuperuvali** and the **Kattuperuvali** - connected lie various centres. It may be concluded that the economy of the Kongu country during the medieval period was certainly self-sufficient. In spite of the vagaries of the monsoons, the people seemed to have led a prosperous life because of their hard work.

<sup>i</sup> In. from Perur -46, (UP) Copied: T.S.D.A.C

<sup>ii</sup> S.I.I., Vol. XXVI, No.144

<sup>iii</sup> In. from Anaimalai-3, (UP) Copied: T.S.D.A.C

<sup>iv</sup> S.I.I., Vol. XXVI, No.152.

<sup>v</sup> In. from Anaimalai-3, (UP) Copied : T.S.D.A.C

<sup>vi</sup> In. from Anaimalai-6, (UP) Copied: T.S.D.A.C

<sup>vii</sup> In. from avinashi, (UP) Copied : T.S.D.A.C

<sup>viii</sup> S.I.I., Vol. XXVI, No.136

- ix S.I.I. Vol. XXVI, No. 164  
x S.I.I., XXVI, No.143.  
xi S.I.I., Vol.V,No.152.  
xii S.I.I., Vol. XXVI, No. 149.  
xiii S.I.I., Vol. XXVI, No.147  
xiv A.R.E., 88 of 1915.  
xv S.I.I., Vol. XXVI, No. 117  
xvi In. from Perur-51, (UP) Copied : T.S.D.A.C  
xvii A.R.E., 420 of 1958-59.  
xviii A.R.E., 92 of 1915.  
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xx S.I.I., Vol.XXVI, No. 146.  
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xxii A.R.E., 611 of 1922.  
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xxiv S.I.i.,Vol. XXVI,No.244.  
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