# INSCRIPTION TERMS AND CONTRASTING PICTURE IN THE HISTORY OF CHOLAS

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Interpreting the inscriptional term is very crucial for historical understanding of ancient as well as medieval period. In this vein Noboru Karashima wrote, 'The main source of ancient and medieval South Indian history is inscriptions, which have survived in good numbers for the period from eighth to seventh centuries. If we read these inscriptions, we can recognize the changes that occurred in state and social formation at certain stages during this millennium." This paper will highlight some of the inscription terms, and its different interpretations prevailed in the available literature. The purpose of the article is to bring out those different interpretations and its varied historical pictures, Moreover this study will cite another inscription which gives different interpretation for further scope of study. Moreover this study will also use *Silapadikaram* as a literary evidence for comparing the history as gleaned from inscriptional evidences. The foregoing analysis once again reminds the statement made by K.A. Nilakanta Sastri<sup>23</sup> for a long back about the basic sources of inscriptions for the studies of ancient and medieval. In the inscriptions of South India are to be found many technical terms, bearing on social, economic, military and administrative matters. A correct understanding of these terms is an essential preliminary to the reconstruction of social life of the period. The scientific study and interpretation of the sources of South Indian history has not advanced tar beyond the elementary stages. The interpretation is very strong to forge ahead with sweeping conclusion drawn from stray facts without waiting for the chain of evidence to be completed.

#### Introduction

Interpreting the inscriptional term is very crucial for historical understanding of ancient as well as medieval period. In this vein Noboru Karashima wrote, 'The main source of ancient and medieval South Indian history is inscriptions, which have survived in good numbers for the period from eighth to seventh centuries. If we read these inscriptions, we can recognize the changes that occurred in state and social formation at certain stages during this millennium." This paper will highlight some of the inscription terms, and its different interpretations prevailed in the available literature. The purpose of the article is to bring out those different interpretations and its varied historical pictures, Moreover this study will cite another inscription which gives different interpretation for further scope of study. Moreover this study will also use *Silapadikaram* as a literary evidence for comparing the history as gleaned from inscriptional evidences.

# **Conceptual Framework**

Tamil country during the period of 8<sup>th</sup> century to 13<sup>th</sup> century was ruled by *Chola* dynasty. About the character and function of the state K.A.Nilakanta Sastri mentioned that it was a Byzantine empire and collected the dues from all its conquered territories even from Sri Lanka.<sup>2</sup> But American Professor Burton Stein categorized the *Chola* state as a segmentary state in which the Tanjore kings exercised ritual sovereignty than that of political sovereignty.<sup>3</sup> Japanese scholar Noboru Karashima by applying the time scale and the concept of change attributed that *Chola* state prior to Rajaraja-I was segmentary one but from Rajaraja-I there was an attempt to change segmentary state to an imperial state.<sup>4</sup> These different concepts about the *Chola* state had evolved mainly on the basis of the interpretation of the inscriptions terms. This paper will spot light those different interpretations for some selected terms.

### The Term Utaiyan and its Interpretations

The inscription term *utaiyan* is appearing in the *Chola's* inscriptions among which the following may be mentioned as examples.

#### **Inscriptions**

- 1. An inscription of m Prakara Northwall issued in the period of Kulothunga I dated 9<sup>th</sup> regnal year CE 1079, (Published in Sll Vol. XXIV. No. 28).
- 2. Ill Prakara Northwall issued in the period of Kulothunga-I, dated 11th regnal yeas C.E 1081(S 11 volume XXIV. No.32).
- 3. An inscription found in Ekambaranatha temple, Kanchipuram, Chingel put issued in the period of Uttama Chola, dated CE 984. (XXII No. 2).
- 4. An inscription found in Tirukkadiyur, Tanjore District issued in the period of Rajendra I dated C.E 1028.29. (SI 1 vol XXII No. 20).
- 5. An inscription found in Tirukadiyur, Tanjore district issued in the period of Rajaraja II, C.E1150-51. XXIII. No. 31.

About the term *utaiyan* K.A. Nilakantasastri has interpreted that the term *utaiyan* has indicated the officials, who got land grant from the king and collected some of the dues of Central Government.<sup>5</sup> Japanese scholar Noboru Karashmia has given different interpretations. In the earliest work of Karashima "A *Concordance of the Names in the Cola Inscriptions;* (1978) he explained that the term *utaiyan* in the following way. 'Unless otherwise preceded by the holy place village name such *Tiruchirrambalam* indicates that the person has the private ownership of some land in the village'.<sup>6</sup>

The interpretation of Karashima is differed from the interpretations of K.A.Nilakanta Sastri which has considered *utiayan* not as the owner of the land, but an assignee of central government dues. A categorical statement to the above meaning is found in the following writings of K.A.Nilakantasastri that what was assigned in these cases was by no means the absolute proprietorship of the soil, which always belonged to the individual occupies, or the village community. Nevertheless, the argument of Karashima's scholarship has put forwarded that the *utaiyan* remains to be the private owner of the land.

These two scholarships in their idea of interpreting the term *utaiyan* fcave allowed framing two different types of historical pictures about the polity and society of *Cholas*. One view was that the officials who got land assignment of king's dues had led to the creation of feudal tenure in the age of *Cholas*. Another view was that the private owners of the land had functioned as officials in the bureaucratic polity of Cholas. This can be represented as a following figure.

Private Land Owner State Official Land Grants

Official's Bureaucracy Feudal Tenure

Figure 1

However, Karashima's latest book 'South Indian Society in Transition Ancient to Medieval (2009) has shed new light on the term utaiyan in the following lines.<sup>7</sup>

In many *brahmadeya* villages, individual land holding by Brahmins was introduced and the land given to state officers in such prebendal tenure as *jivitam* or *janmakani* was held by these privileged official's individuals thus producing an *utaiyan* class in many wr-type villages too'.

Based upon the above interpretation it is indicated that during the age of the *Cholas* there were existed both feudal land lords, and the private owners of the land whom were collectively called as *utaiyan in* those times.

## The Interpretation of the Terms Kutinikki and Kutininka

Unlike the 95% presence of *Utaiyan* term in the inscriptions, the inscription terms *Kutininkka* and *Kutininki* are only meager in the inscriptions. They are available in Pudukottai state inscriptions. They may be quoted as follows for studies.

- 1. Place of the inscription Tiruvidaimarudur District, Tanjore, Dated 976 CE (Published in South Indian Inscriptions volume XXIII No. 257.)
- 2. Narttamalai, Pudukottai, Dated 1228.C.E. (Published in IPS. No 283.)
- 3. Tiruppattur, Dated 1320C.E. (Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy, 1908-598)

To the term kutinikki Burton Stein has interpreted that they were the old tenants of the land and they were evicted.<sup>8</sup> However, Karashima has interpreted the term *kutininka* as that the tenants who could not be evicted. Despite the different interpretations in the literature an inscription of Tiruvidaimarudur dated 960.C.E. published in S.II Volume 111, S. Rajadurai No 203 offers different interpretation. This inscription, quoted by Karashima<sup>1</sup> records that 'the Sabhaiyar of Tiraimur which was a devadana- brahmadeya were paying in tax only 800 kalam of paddy (nel) on the pretext of the village being kudininka though it was actually kutinikki. The later sense became clear through the investigation of an officer and the sabhaiyar were ordered to pay 2800 kalam. The Sabhaiyar seemed to have misappropriated 2000 Kalam of nel enjoyable by the kuti of kutininka devadana'. The explanatory note found in the above book indicates that there was a wide discrepancy prevailed<sup>2</sup> in the payment of dues between the Kutininka and kutinikki land as suggested by Dharmakumar. This note makes one point to emerge. The non-payment of dues by Sabhai on the pretext kutininka indicates that Sabhai had rights over the land and to retain some quantity of produce for itself without paying it to the temple. Those kinds of rights had been practiced by the Sabhai, since the kudiship of the land was in the hands of Sabhai. That was called as kudi in those times and was recorded in the inscriptions. From this it is interpreted that the term kudi indicates the occupancy rights of sabhai over the Devadanam land.

Sabhai's (the village community's) rights over the devadanam villages were known in those, times as kudi is gleaned from the inscription of Palamadai of Tirunelveli<sup>10</sup>. This inscription records that both the king Jatavarman Kulasekara Pandya I and the Sabhai of Mukkokilanati Caturvedimankalam were present. The Sabhai members had made representation (ceyya) to the king for the fixation of taxes over their land. The king on their representation issued oral orders to the Sabhai members. At that time the king had addressed the sabhai members as plural and also in third person (tankal). The king said that 'tankalutankutiyana nilankalil (i.e.) to, thou lands of kudiship. This indicates that Sabhai had occupancy rights over the devadanam villages and the other land. This kind of prevalence of occupancy rights held by the village assembles were also identified by Kenneth R. Hall, in his study. He had described the occupancy rights as follows:<sup>3</sup> That the Nagaram held jurisdictional as well as proprietary rights over neighboring agricultural land are stressed in local inscriptions. In this instance, the Nagaram may be compared to a Brahmadeya, an institution which also exercised managerial rights over land but does not seem to have been actively involved otherwise in the cultivation process. 'Due to the religious focus of Cola epigraphy, local nagarams' are more conspicuous while exercising managerial rights over land owned by others.' The above mentioning of jurisdictional or management rights in the above studies indicate nothing but the occupational rights of the village assemblies.

The holding of occupancy rights by the village communities had given the privilege to collect the taxes from the land. Those taxes are known in those times as *kudimai*. The main concern here is that the village communities exercised those rights even when the land was donated to somebody. This is known from the following passages of K.A.Nilakantasastri. <sup>12</sup>

'After recording the gift of **some** fields as *eri-patti* (tank-land) the **assembly** (*ur*) of *Nerkunram* under took never to exercise their rights of taxation in a manner calculated to abrogate the gift. The inscriptional phrase cited by K.A. Nilakantasastri for the meaning is 'Kudimai seyyiV (if (we) levy Kudimai). For giving the above interpretation K. A. Nilakantasastri has refuted one interpretation given by Krishna Sastri. Krishna Sastri has translated the *term* 'Kudimai Seyyil' as' if we assert our occupancy rights K. A. Nilakantasastri remarks that it seemed to be a promise meant to stop not the **encroachment** on the land itself, but **on** the **income** from it which was to be devoted to the

maintenance of tanks.<sup>13</sup> These two interpretations actually indicate the prevalence of the occupancy rights of the village assemblies over the land. By this right they collected the dues and even they disposed it for some other purposes. Again Kenneth R. Hall mentioned <sup>14</sup> that the inscription explains that in addition to the above conditions of sale, taxes normally collected from this land were still payable to the *Nagaram*. Inscriptions record not only the price paid for land, but also stipulate that a separate payment was made to cover future taxes due on this land. For example, the *nagaram* of *Vanavan madewpuram (Tirumanikuli, South Arcot)* after selling land to a temple received twenty-two extra *kasu* of gold to pay for future taxes. This sort of occupancy rights had been ushered because of the custom of paying the king's dues by the village assemblies. This is indicated in the following analytical passages of K.A.Nilakantasastri.<sup>15</sup>

A record of 1215 from *Narttamalai Pudukottai* related to a *kudi-ninka Devadanam* created by the *nagaram* who sold some land to two merchants. The terms of this sale are shown how complex and yet how equitable to all parties concerned the regulation of land rights could be. For all the dues to be paid to the king on account of this land, *ulagudainayanar tiruvasalal vandairai kudimaiyum*, *marrum epper pattanavum*, the *nagaram* hold themselves responsible even after the sale. The two persons to whom the land was sold in equal shares had to give to the temple 30 *kalams* of paddy each in any year in which yield of the whole land was normal, in lean years they had to remit 2 and 1/2 *kalams* on each *ma* of land actually cropped (*vilainjanilattukku*). Clearly here the rights of the temple were confined to *melvaram* at a rate fixed beforehand, the tenants keeping the balance of the yield and not having to pay the taxes due to the central government as these were paid by the *nagaram*".

As the taxes due were paid by the village assembly, in this *kutininka* tenure, the tenant who purchased the temple land put the condition that the land should be sold as *kutininka* (i.e.) the dues taxes of the king would be borne by the village assembly. Thus the above discussion on the term *kutininka*, and *kutinikki* leads to construct three contrasts of the prevalence of tenure rights in the *devadanam* villages in the age of *Cholas*.

One view mentions that the existing cultivators of the *devadanam* village had been extinguished before the villages were sold. Another view indicates that the land of *devadanam* sold to a tenant was permanently belonged to him. The third view proposes that the village communities remain akin to the relic of tribal ownership exercised occupancy rights over all the villages and the lands connected to it and with those rights they collected the dues (*kudimai*) from the land although the owners of the land had been changed. Moreover, they held the responsibility of paying the taxes to the king.

#### The Term Nagaram and Different Interpretations

About the term *nagaram* Karashima stresses that it was comprised by the merchants (*vyaparis*). Karashima quotes the following inscriptions. <sup>16</sup>

- 1. Kalahasti inscription: This inscription records that a state officer came to the town *Mummudi Cholapuram* for settlement of temple affairs. In this settlement *nagarattar* was present as a local body. This inscription records that the *nagarattar* was comprised of four *vyaparis of* whom two were *chettis* and one *Kavare-chetti* and one *mayiletti* of *sankarapadi*.
- 2. Other two Kalahasi inscriptions mention that, *nagarattar* were composed of *vyapari* and *sankarapadi* (merchant).
- 3. Jambai, and Tirukkonam inscriptions record the existence of *sankarapadi nagaram* in Valaiyur and Madurantakapuram.

But R. Hall, interprets *nagaram* as that it was composed not by *vyaparigal* only. He cites the *Devaram* hymns for the constituent of *nagarattar*}<sup>1</sup> He writes that, according to *Devaram* four types of merchants *vyaparigal*, *caliyar*, *sankarapadiyar*, and *vaniyar* were considered to be *nagarattar*. For this he refers Subrahmariya Aiyer's remarks. Finally R. Hall's impression about *nagaram* is as follows.

Thus, it would seem that a *nagaram* was primarily a commercial district inhabited by merchants and others who earned their living from commercial activities, but that only the merchants constituted the *nagaram* in the sense of the decision making body of such a locality'.

While there are two different interpretation about the *nagaram* existed between the two scholarships of karashima and R. Hall, inscription of Rajendra Vinnagar of Vishnu shrine dedicated to Sri Vedanarayana in Mannarkoil village, Ambasamudram Taluk, Tirunelveli district<sup>19</sup> gives different interpretation.

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This inscription is on the wall of the prakara of Kulasekhare shrine contains the *sasanam* (*pidipadu*) given by *nagarathom* of Avani mathanda pura nagaram. It gives permission to the temple, for digging a pond (*Kularri*). But here the point is about the members who constituted the *nagarathom* (assembly of the town). Noboru Karashmia and Kenneth R Hall had indicated that *nagarathom* was constituted by the merchants (*vyaparis*). The present inscription identified the members with their names. This is known from the names of the signatories, recorded in the inscription. The signatories of the decision were as follows:

- 1. Devan Periyan ana vanava Sikamani muventhavelan eluthu. (signature)
- 2. Ariyan Narrayanana kulasekara muventha velan eluthu
- 3. Nambi Rajanna minavan muventha velan eluthu
- 4. Adhicheya Pandy a muventha velan eluthu.
- 5. Uttama Chola silai chetti eluthu.
- 6. Chera narayana muventha velan eluthu.

In the above signatories only one member has the title *chetti*, which indicates the merchant. The other members had the title *muventha velan*. The title *muventha velan* indicates that they were the *vellala*. i.e. agriculturists. So this inscription indicates that agriculturists or the land holders would be also the members of *nagaram* assembly. It is not whether these agriculturists did the trade as part time, or fulltime. So this indicates that *nagarattar* was not constituted exclusively by the *vyaparis*. It must be a flexible body consisting of landholders and the merchants in the locality.

While there were different interpretations about the composition of *nagaram* there was also considerable difference prevailed about the character and functioning of *nagaram* with reference to trade and commerce. Before to see the differences of quantum of trade and commerce, to look about the commercial activity which happened in the period of Post *Sangam* period i.e. 500-800 C.E.prior to the *Chola* period is essential. For this there is a lengthy passage in the literature *Silapadikaram*. The epic mentions that even in 300 CE, at Madurai city,

Carriages of many kinds, metal armours. Wood and ivory carvings, pearl - handled spears Brass and coir works, shields of leather, Flowers woven into many shapes fans of white fur Pipes for burning incense and collyrium jars were there In the bazaar their even kings may desire, Flawless diamonds, without crow's foot, Opacity or lines and spots, and clean cut And in approved colors and of beneficial, Kind were exhibited for sales, Sapphires free of line and spots, of pure rays And cool, found there an honored place Rubies, emeralds, cat's eyes and others Of fine quality were sold in shop counters Topaz, amethyst, amber, jade, opal and beryl, Were also equality available The nature of these gems was familiar To the people of Maturai, who did prosper? In the absence of the troubles and perils of war In the shops in particular sheets selling bullion, Flags indicating the kinds of gold therein Sold were flown - red, purple, yellow and green There were sheets exclusively for textiles, Cotton, woolen and silk fabrics were in piles, In convenient lengths also they were kept folded In shops contiguously situated, Brokers always carried weights and measures Tools of their trade, to the market for groceries In certain other streets lay in profusion, Bags of pepper; cereals, and every provision

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Walking along the market, the four main sheets The office area, the lanes and cross sheets Passing intersections of three or four ways Kovalan, protected by the Suns rays, Visited every part of Maturai city Before returning to his wife and kavunti<sup>20</sup>.

From the above lengthy passage of Silapadikaram poem it is interpreted that the quantum of trade and commerce was larger in Tamilndu during the period of Post-Sangam (C.E.500-800). But such grandeur of trade was completely changed in the Chola period. The trade was happened within the village level. For knowing the trade and the commerce happened in the Chola period the interpretation to the term nagaram and about its functioning becomes essential. But however there are differences of interpretations about the functioning of *nagaram* in the context of trade and commerce. Kneeth R.Hall who has exhaustively analyzed the trade and commerce happened in the Chola period mentions that thus I have argued that it was the nagaram which provided the arena for local commercial contract between local and itinerant merchants. The Piranmalai inscription's reference to the three levels of itinerant activity the pattinam, the coastal ports (valarpuram) and the periodic markets (tavalam) of the hinterland, followed by its list of the specific nagaram with which the itinerant organization had about the relationship between nagaram and itinerant traders, or guilds R. Hall<sup>21</sup> indicates that in the early *Chola* period, especially certain constraints seem to have been imposed on overland trade which prevented the commercial penetration of itinerant traders below the nagaram level. He further writes in his foot notes as inscriptions stipulate that foreign merchants were to be subject to very specific regulations in most cases, more than those imposed on local merchants.<sup>4</sup> But, Karashima mentions that such rigid dominance of nagaram over guild or itinerant merchant is not present. Moreover he says that guild and nagaram functioned independently. Thus again the historical concept derived from the interpretation of the word *nagarm* differed considerably.<sup>22</sup>

#### Conclusion

The foregoing analysis once again reminds the statement made by K.A. Nilakanta Sastri<sup>23</sup> for a long back about the basic sources of inscriptions for the studies of ancient and medieval. In the inscriptions of South India are to be found many technical terms, bearing on social, economic, military and administrative matters. A correct understanding of these terms is an essential preliminary to the reconstruction of social life of the period. The scientific study and interpretation of the sources of South Indian history has not advanced tar beyond the elementary stages. The interpretation is very strong to forge ahead with sweeping conclusion drawn from stray facts without waiting for the chain of evidence to be completed.

## **Endnotes**

- 1. Noboru Karashima, *South Indian Society in Transition Ancient to Medieval*, Oxford University Press, 2009. p. 1.
- 2. Nilakanta Sastri, K. A., *The Cholas*, University of Madras, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1955. p.447.
- 3. Burton Stein, *Peasant, State and Society in Medieval South India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 274.
- 4. Noboru Karashima, op. cit., pp. 3-5.
- 5. Nilakanta Sastri, K. A., op. cit. p. 464.
- 6. Noboru Karashima, Subbarayalu, Y. and Toru Matsui. *A Concordance of the names in the Chola Inscriptions*, Sarvodaya Uakkiya Pannai, Madurai, 1978, Appendix 3
- 7. Noboru Karashima, op. cit. p. 13
- 8. Burton Stein, 'Vijayanagara c 1350-1564' in Tapan Raychaudri and Irfan Habib ed., *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I (c 1200-1750, Cambridge University Press 1982 p.31
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- 11. Kenneth, R. Hall, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Cholas*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1980, p.60.
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- 14. Kenneth R Hall, op. cit., p. 62.
- 15. Nilakanta Sastri, K. A., op. cit., p. 583.
- 16. Noboru Karashima, op. cit., p. 175.
- 17. Kenneth R Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 123.
- 18. Ibid., p. 125.
- 19. A.R.E No 406 of 1916 Published in R, Tirumalai Rajendra Vinnagar Institute of Epigraphy Tamilnadu State Department of Archaeology 1980 Appendix ii, pp. x
- 20. and xi
- 21. Silapadikaram translated by R. S. Pillai, Thanjavur Tamil University, 1989. pp. 59-60.
- 22. Kenneth R. Hall, op. cit.., p. 127-128, p.139.
- 23. Noboru Karashima, op. cit. pp. 180-184
- 24. Nilakanta Sastri, K. A., *Journal of The Madras University*, 1929. p.38, quoted in R. Tirumalai Rajendra Vinnagar. Institute of Epigraphy Tamilnadu State Department of Archaeology, 1980.
- 25. 'primitive' tribal communities. Some studies already have noticed that the Kurumbars have a close affinity with Megalithic communities. E.Thurston observes tHat the Kurubas / Kurumbar were the slaves of the dominant Coorgs.
- 26. E. Thurston says that Mudugars carry their children on their backs, that is why they are called as the tribe Muduvar or Mudugar, or back people. Thurston also says that they had dispersed in the 14th century.
- 27. It was Francis Buchanan who gave the account of many jungle tribes in the Nilgiri hills after Father Jacome Finicio's Report. There is a confusion regarding the relation between Budugar and Mudugar, There is a least 'possibility' that both of these groups are originated from one ethnic group but, later may have separated.
- 28. G.C. Tharakan, "The Muduga and Kurumba of Kerala, South India and the Social Organization of Hunting and Gathering", *Journal of Ecological Anthropology*, Vol.11, 2007. p.5.
- 29. Some studies by Haimendorf show that the Mudugar have traditional relations with the tribal communities like the Kurumbar, and Todas.
- 30. M.Remesh, and Manju C Nair. "Ethncbryological Notes from Western Ghats, India", *The Bryologist*, Vol.112, No.3, Fall, 2009.p.534.
- 31. Kurumbars and Mala-Aryans are other communities showing the Megalithic tradition.
- 32. M.Poyil, "Megalithism and Tribal Ritualism: A Passage through the Kurumbas of Attappadi", *Advances in Historical Studies*, Vol.2, No.2, 2013. p.54.
- 33. Some scholars like Rao, Chakravartti, Buchanan, Kallathil, Zvelebil and few others named Irula, Erula, Erulas, Irular, Irulars, Eriligaru, Illru, Ilru or Iruluru (Tamil *Irula*) say that Irular are also called as Erullava, Iruliga, Illiga, Kasova, Urali, Kadupujari, and Velliga.
- 34. E. Thurston, Assumes Irula means darkness / blackness, whether in reference to the dark jungles or skin of the Irula is not clear.
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- 37. R.M. Pitchappan, op.cit., p.60.
- 38. S. Velluva, S *op.cit.* p. 12. Also See in his Dynamics of Land Use in Recently Selected Forest Areas: A Case Study of Attappady, Kerala, Ph.D Thesis, **Division** of Economics, Kerala Forest Research Institute, Peechi, Thrissur and Department of Applied Economics, Cochin University of Science and Technology, Cochin, Kerala, p. 17.
- 39. Indian Historical Studies Vol. XII, No. 2~124~
- 40. Iron Age History of Attappady: New Findings