

THE HISTORICITY OF EELAM

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The reference to Eelam as an independent sovereign political unit is being controverted by people with no idea of South Indian or Sri Lankan history and even people with a smattering of South Indian history, let alone Sri Lankan history. People with vested political interests are making use of this ignorance to promote their goals. In this brief outline, some rock solid facts are brought out to demolish those imaginary arguments.

Literary Evidence:

In the Tamil Sangam classics we find poems of a poet by the name **Eelattu PootanTevanar** (ஈழத்து பூதன் தேவனார்) We find that he is being called **Madurai Eelattu PootanTevanar** (மதுரை ஈழத்து பூதன் தேவனார்) later on. We can infer that in recognition of his high academic status, the King of the Pandyan territory must have given him an honorary citizenship in the capital **Madurai**.

In the Sangam anthology **Ten Idylls (Pattup Paattu - பத்துப் பாட்டு)** there is a reference in the poem **Pattinapalai** – (பட்டினப்பாலை) to food items being imported from Eelam and other articles being imported from Myanmar (ஈழத்து உணவும் காழகத்து ஆக்கழும்)¹. This shows that Eelam was not within the political authority of the Pandyan kings.

Chinese Records:

Chinese sea faring started late by about the sixth century AD. But they had land contacts earlier. Sri Lanka has been known to the Chinese by various names.

One of the names is Eelam. They called it **Eelamdoe** (嶺南島 - ஈழம்தீவு)².

Doe in Chinese means Island while *gua* means country. This means that the Chinese have had trade dealings with Eelam. The South Indian Port of Kollam (*Kolambam*) now in Kerala, was the life wire of sea borne trade of yonder years, especially silk route days. Eelam, at its southern tip, and within the same sea borne activity area, also had a lucrative sea borne trade.

Epigraphic Evidence:

We have reference to Eelam in two significant inscriptions from Madurai, the glorious capital of the Pandyan territory. One is from *Thirupparangkunram* (திருப்பரங்குன்றம்). According to this inscription dated to second century BC it was indited by a person from the country called Eelam³. The word *Eela kutumpikan* (ஈழ குடும்பிகள்) is significant. *Kutumpu* (குடும்பி) in Tamil means an independent political unit⁴. This shows that Eelam was outside the domain of the Pandyan suzerainty.

The other inscription is from Alagar malai (அலகர் மலை). It refers to a king from Eelam who contributed much to the construction of tanks – *Eela vavi rayan*

(ஸழ வாவிராயன்). – One who promoted hydraulic civilization like Karikalan who built the Kallanai, the ancient anicut of Tamil Nadu⁵. The significance is the reference to the tank builder as **King** of Eelam. That means Eelam was a sovereign independent State. Incidentally, it may be noted that the Vels (வேளியு) played a great role in the promotion of hydraulic civilization both in Tamil Nadu⁶ and Sri Lanka⁷.

The Anuradhapura Tamil Householders Inscription refers to Eelam as a blessed land from where those mentioned in that inscription had come⁸. The inscription is clear although Paranavitane had wrongly read it as *Ilubarata*. In Prakrit language there is no V sound. V is represented by B Paranavitane is not conversant with Indian Hindu traditions. It is clearly written as Eela B (V)rta Dameda-
(ஆழவர்த தமேத -ஆழத்திருநாட்டு தமிழர் - வடக்கரை) – something comparable to Hindu traditional usage Arya Vrta – **ஆரியவர்த**, and Brahma Vrta – **பிரமவர்த**.

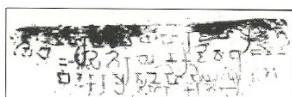
The B (ஓ) has to be taken as V (ஃ) and has to be read as Eela Vrta Dameda
(ஆழவர்த தமேத -ஆழத்திருநாட்டு தமிழர் - வடக்கரை) It would mean Tamils from the blessed land of Eelam. There is a parallel. In the Vallipuram gold sheet inscription, because there is no V sound in Prakrit, Vadakarai -**வடகரை** (வடகரை) is written as Badakara (பாடகரை) and Paranavitane has read it as Badakara atana. However Kanapathipillai has correctly read it as Vadakarai atana-**வடகரை**⁹. It may be noted that some foreigners basing on this name vadakarai –**வடகரை** called the area **extreme North**. Atana is the Prakritisised version of the Sanskrit word *stana* meaning place. Kanapathipillai justifies his reading by referring to the nearby village Kudatani, a Tamilised form of Kuda Atana meaning the western side. Kuda is the archaic Tamil word for West. Another archaic Tamil word used is Kuna for East as found in *Kuna malai* (குனமலை). - Eastern Hill) which with the prefix *Tiru* (திரு) meaning sacred has become Tirukkunamalai. It is how both Sinhalese and Tamil ordinary citizens call the place Trincomalie – Tirukkunaamalai. You can see an elongated kunaa instead of Kuna in colloquial usage. Because Portuguese records refer to three pagodas having existed before destruction at the hill top, subsequent usage based on that assumption made it *Thirikonamalai*, which became corrupted to Thirukonamalai. One will be amused to see how Tamil scholars even used an invented name *Thirukkonaatha malai* meaning un-desecrated hill in the 19th century but it faded into oblivion. Even South Sri Lanka had the Tamil word *Tentirai Thotta* (தெந்திறை) for South which corrupted to Dondra in the tongues of Westerners. Even Colombo the capital of the West is the shortened form of the Tamil name *Kolambam*. (The Sinhalese still call it *Kolamba*. On the basis of this inscription, Eelam was outside the domain of the suzerainty of Anuradhapura also.

Dameda again has to be read as Damela or Damila following the readings of similar writing from Kodumanal in Tamil Nadu in India. Mahadevan has dwelt on this in detail¹⁰

Eelam is mentioned in the Tamil inscription of the great Chola King Rajendra 1 found on a pillar retrieved from the Jaffna Fort. This inscription can be dated to the eleventh century AD. The inscription refers to **King** of Eelam and hence it has to be concluded that Eelam was a sovereign independent Kingdom even at that time¹¹.

The Tamil Kingdom lost its sovereignty to the Portuguese after a long bitter and bloody battle in 1619. The Tamils were never under Sinhalese kings. Even Parakrama Bahu VI who conquered the Tamil Kingdom was himself a Tamil King though he ruled the Kotte Kingdom. This did not last long as the Tamil kingdom was soon retrieved from the Kotte kingdom and was independent till 1619.

Vallipuram Inscription



Anuradhapura Inscription



¹ Pattu Paddu – Pattinappaalai (பத்துப் பாட்டு – பட்டினப்பாலை).

² Hai Guo Tu Shi – Vol. 3, p. 1133

(Records with illustrations of the countries in the sea)

³ Mahadevan, Iravatham, Corpus of Tamil Brahmi Inscriptions, 1966

(Dept. of Archaeology, Tamil Nadu, Chennai, India)

⁴ Natana Kasinathan, Epigraphy (Tamil) (கல்லெழுத்து), 1989

⁵ Vengadasamy, M.S., -Cited by Pushparatnam,P .in his doctoral thesis on the cultural history of the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

⁶ Champakalakshmy,R.

⁷ Goonetilake, Susantha , The Hydraulic Civilization of Sri Lanka,
(A Monograph submitted to the UNESCO) Cited by Mervyn de Silva in the Lanka
Guardian, April(?) 1988.

⁸ Paranavitane, S. , The Tamil Householders Inscription at Anuradhapura,
Journal of the Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch) Vol. xxxv, pt. 93, pp.55-56

⁹ Kanapathipillai K. (under pen name: A student of Tamil), Vallipuram Gold
Plate Inscription,Ceylon Daily News 26 March 1938.

¹⁰ Mahadevan, Iravatham, Early Tamil Epigraphy, 2003, pp.187-194

¹¹ Rajendra's Inscription

“.... பொருக்டல்
சழத்தரசர் முடியும்
அங்கவர் தேவியர்
ஒங்கெழில் முடியும்
அன்னவர் பக்கல்

தென்னவர் வைத்த
சுந்தர முடியும்
இந்திரன் ஆரமும்
தென்திரை ஈழ
மண்டலம் முழுவதும்
.....”