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## **Titles and Territory: the Legacy of the Palaiyakkarar in South India**

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# Titles and Territory: the Legacy of the Palaiyakkarar<sup>1</sup> in South India

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## **Abstract**

Titles and territories are important symbols of power valued by their holders to assert their position of authority. In tracing the history of positions of authority one often comes across archival sources authenticating these titles and their corresponding territory. These sources include a variety of documents such as the family genealogy, inscriptions in stone and copper, letters of ordinance; to name a few. Such sources are reproduced with every change to the larger power structure recording the validation and continuity of authority. This is also the case in the present study of the Kongu Vellala Palaiyakkarar, where such sources are preserved by the title holders. However, since independence of India and, democracy taking over the larger political structure, the continuity in validation of these titles has been stalled in the absence of favourable ordinance. This paper argues that such sources continue to vouch for the lineage of authority and authenticate its continuity in collective memory brought about through not only the reproduction and display of the sources but more importantly, the particularity of this position of authority that remains unchallenged in the political structure of democracy.

*Keywords: Kingship, Legacy, Authority, Titles, Territory, Collective Memory*

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The king is dead, long live the kingship (Evans-Pritchard, 1962: 84)

In the month of October 2011 when I started my field work among the Chieftains from the Kongu vellalar caste in Kongu Mandalam (one among the five traditional territories recorded in the *sangam* literatures and archival sources) in the western part of Tamil nadu. It was not easy at the beginning to meet them, through many attempts I managed to get an appointment with one of the descendant from this chieftain's family. Through his contacts with other chieftains family he established my further connections. In one such first contact, I explained about my doctoral research and asked him about their ancestors; before he answering, he asked me that have I come across a particular book, a vernacular production. Then he went and brought a copy of that book and told me to read so that I will know about their family. With so much interest I started reading the book and came to know that the book is a printed version of their vamsavali (genealogy) document which is stored at the Government Oriental Manuscript Library at Madras University. Of course it contained other information's from other sources too, but this vamsavali gives a complete line of male members from the origin till 1801, when the document was submitted to MacKenzie (the first surveyor general of in India during the regime of British East India Company, here after EIC). Who is a ardent collector of such materials and most of his collections contains the genealogy of such families.

Further when I continued my discussion with the descendants, they brought out certain portions of the vamsavali where the myths and legends connected to their ancestors are recorded. Not only the descendants but the people in the territory too had certain orition of the vamsavali in a oral tradition of the chiefs ancestor migrated to the territory and what are the achievements he has done during his life time. This people account is not only contains information of the very old but the recent past such as how the electricity to the village was first introduced by one such chief who studied abroad brought with him the generator and the electric bulbs. Thus the collective memory is established through the written records of the past and the testimony of the present. The following pages will dwell with one such chieftains and the written records pertaining to that family and the connected testimony from the territory, to see how these two establishes the collective memory which in turn authenticates the legacy of the chieftain and enhances his authority in the territory.

Titles and territories are important symbols of power valued by their holders to assert their position of authority. In tracing the history of positions of authority one often comes across archival sources authenticating these titles and their corresponding

territory. These sources include a variety of documents such as the family genealogy, inscriptions in stone and copper, letters of ordinance; to name a few. Such sources are reproduced with every change to the larger power structure recording the validation and continuity of authority. This is also the case in the present study, where such sources are preserved by the title holders.

The paper attempts to trace the authority of the *palaiyakkarar*<sup>2</sup> or 'Little Kings' in Kongu Nadu from its origin till date. It does so through collective memory which combines, the written documents of the past and the oral testimony from the present (Joutard, 1977). In this attempt the paper focuses largely on the *vamcāvali* (*vamsam*=family; *vali*=path) along with a couple of stone and copper inscriptions, an ordinance from the East India Company and photographs. These archival documents are kept alive in public memory by the descendants by reproducing copies of it for distribution and display; building an oral testimony and adding to the collective memory.

The vamsavali document is itself a product of collective memory. It was collected by the British East India Company (here after EIC) official, the first Surveyor General of India, Colonel Colin MacKenzie, in the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The document written in Tamil states

from ancient time, across the rule of the various regimes, the recording of history pertaining to the vamsavali has been lost. The information recorded in this vamsavali is collated from different sources, that include, *kirantam* (*religious text-myth*), *Olugu* (land ownership records), and legends of their ancestors transmitted across generations.

The vamsavali text used in this paper belongs to *ūr̥rukūḷi pāḷaiyakkarar kālīnkarāyaṅ*, the original manuscript of this vamsavali is filed under the catalogue number **D 3044** in the Government Oriental Manuscript Library (GOML), in Chennai (at Madras University). This text is one of the '2,070 local tracts (many of which were *vamcāvali*)' (Dirks, 1982: 664), collected by Mackenzie and his team.

The vamsavali of the kalingarayar gives a list of their ancestor names for 20 generations and more, from around 12<sup>th</sup> century to 1800. It discusses the territorial identity of the palaiyakkarar ancestry through their migration, followed by heroic episodes on the basis of which titles and gifts (including emblems and territories) were bestowed on them by different kingly dynasties leading to their royal status and authority. However, since independence of India and, democracy taking over the larger political structure, the continuity in validation of these titles has been stalled in the absence of favourable

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<sup>2</sup>Palaiyakkarar: little king, or chief, corrupted by the British into poligar and polegar. (Dirks, 1987: xxiv)

ordinance. This paper argues that such sources continue to vouch for the lineage of authority and authenticate its continuity in collective memory brought about through not only the reproduction and display of the sources but more importantly, the particularity of this position of authority that remains unchallenged in the political structure of democracy.

In the democratic political structure, there is no position of authority that resembles that of the chieftains. The independent democratic state has progressively nullified the authority of the chieftains. The vacuum created in this position of authority has not been replaced by an equivalent (Quigley, 2005: 1). By this statement, I am referring to an authority simultaneously in-charge of administration of an equal territory with powers of legal defence (police, army) and revenue. And even more importantly, an individual who holds authority based on a legacy of valour, largesse and ritual status. (Maurice [1941] 1992: 123)

Given this reality, a situation arises where the loss of chiefly authority has been unchallenged by an equal authority and therefore by default the legacy survives and continues even without a favourable ordinance through the practice of collective memory. The paper justifies this argument, through the conscious effort made by the chieftains till date in valourising the vamsavali and related evidences. It is important, therefore to look into the contents of the vamsavali to understand the creation and legitimacy of chiefly identity.

## **The Kalingarayar palaiyakarar**

Kalingarayar is one of the Kongu Vellala<sup>3</sup> palaiyakarar, chieftain of Kongu Nadu. The descendants of this palaiyakkarar live in Zamin<sup>4</sup> Uthukuli village of Pollachi Taluk in Coimbatore District. The whole lineage of the Kalingarayar family uses the title “Kalingarayar” as a suffix to their names. When asked one of the descendant’s stated that ‘the title Kalingarayar is our family name, and our ancestors earned it out of their valour, it is our legacy, we are proud to use the title’. While people outside their erstwhile territory address them with this title, inside their territory they are addressed as Raja (King), Ejamanar (Lord), and samy (God).

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<sup>3</sup> A caste group involved in agro pastoral subsistence in western part of Tamil nadu, traditionally called Kongu nadu

<sup>4</sup> Via Urdu from Persian zamīndār, from zamīn ‘land’

There are two Kongu Vellala palaiyakkarars in this district, the Uthukuli Kalingarayar and Samathur Vanavarayar. I first visited them in October 2011 during the Dasara festival, which is one of the important festivals for the palaiyakkarars, common among the kings and chiefs in India (Dirks, 1987; Kane, 1974; Price, 1996). I met the descendants of Kalingarayar in their palace at Zamin Uthukuli, when they took me around the palace and showed various artefacts, old documents and valuable information pertaining to their ancestors and their Zamin. This first visit continued on a regular basis, where fieldwork was conducted during January through June 2012; and July through December 2013. Other visits include, August to November in 2014, October 2015, and January 2016.

The following description of Uthukuli Zamin is from one of the annual reports of the Zamin. This report gives an idea about how the Zamin functioned in the year 1911. The territory of Uthukuli zamin at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century had ten villages which comprised thirteen hamlets. Zamin Uthukuli is situated three and half kilometres west of Pollachi town on the road from Pollachi to Anamalai hills. As per the annual report of the Zamin, the boundary of the Zamin stretches in the north till Ramapatnam Zamin and Thalakarai, in the east till Pollachi and Suleswaranpatti, in the south till Ambarampalaiyam, Marchinayakanpalaiyam and Athupollachi, in the west till Manakadavu (1911:1).

This territory was sanctioned by the British East India Company in the year 1871 through a *sanad* (order) which states that, Agathur Muthu Cumarasamy Kalingarayar has control over these ten villages. The family held this territory for generations and renewed its authority at the arrival of every new sovereign; EIC is one of the sovereign. At the time of the report the total area of the Zamin is 8875. 81 acres. This 1911 account of the Zamin underwent changes after independence with the many laws that curtailed their authority and territory.

In the Kalingarayar vamsavali can be read in two parts. The first part talks of the vellala migration to Kongu territory, followed by the division of this territory into 24 parts or nadu, the vellala acquiring land (Kani) rights and settling in Kongu as kaniyalars, followed by certain individuals becoming nadu heads or nattu goundars and subsequently nadu heads becoming pattakkarrar. The title of pattakkarar is given to the 24 nadu heads through coronation by the three monarchs, the Chera-Chola-Pandya and marks the second part of the vamsavali where emerges the link to royalty. This is followed in the regime of Rayar dynasty (13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries) these pattakkarar and other chiefs are re-designated as palaiyakkarar, they continued as palaiyakkarars until 1871 when they are re-designated as Zamindars by the British colonial powers. This

sequence of origin and transformation of authority is brought out through the writing of the vamsavali and augmented in other sources also.

## The vamsavali: tracing origin and continuity of authority

### Theme 1: Migration

According to the vamsavali of Kongu Vellala chieftains, Kongu vellalars were originally from Thondai Mandalam and migrated to Kongu Mandalam during the Chola regime (see map below). Migration of vellala gains importance because most of the documents pertaining to Kongu vellala caste and their chieftains reiterate this incident as their starting point (Rasu, 2013: 6).

This following episode is from Kalingarayar vamsavali.

In ancient times (*pūrvattil*) in Chola country there lived sixty thousand (60000) families (*gotharakarargal*), who were recognized as Thondai mandalathu vellalar. They were further divided into two groups, *Nar̥kuṭi*<sup>5</sup> forty eight thousand (48000) and *Pacuṅkuṭi* twelve thousand (12000). Later, Chola king Rishabhagiri's daughter was given in marriage to Chera king for which eight thousand (8000) vellala families from the *Nar̥kuṭi* forty-eight thousand (48000) families were given as gift (*citaṇam*). As a result, the eight thousand (8000) vellala families migrated towards the south, and were consequently called *ten* (south) *thisai* (direction) vellalar. Further, as they migrated for the Chera country and as the Chera king was also named as 'Kongan', the eight thousand (8000) vellala families were named as Kongu vellala (**Episode one**).

This first episode refers to the period before 1000CE when the vellalar migrated during the regimes of Chola and Chera. South India was ruled by these monarchs in ancient times and the literature pertaining to that time, i.e. Sangam Literature, indicates their existence and valour.

The third monarch, the Pandyas ruled the southern part of present Tamil Nadu, with Madurai as their capital. Literatures indicate their respective territories as Chola Mandalam, Pandya Mandalam and Chera Mandalam. In this respect Kongu Mandalam

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<sup>5</sup> *Nar̥kuṭi* relates to the vellalar and *Pacuṅkuṭi* is the 18 other castes who assisted the vellalar in settled agriculture (Rasu, 2013: 37). There is another division called *Ēerkuṭi* which is mentioned in one of the copper plates called 'Tirucceṅkōṭu Eṭṭu Kulattār Ceppēṭu', but does not provide explanation to it.

has been regarded as a separate territory from ancient times. Kongu did not have any separate monarch but has been under the influence of all these three monarchs. These monarchs had certain influences on Kongu but neither of them annexed and ruled it completely.

Among the three, the Chera kings seem to have had a little 'supremacy' over Kongu (Arokiaswami, 1956: 62-63). The first episode of the vamsavali notes that the vellalas were named as Kongu vellala after the Chera king Kongan and were settled in Kongu 24- nadu as a result of the Chera King's marital alliance with the Cholas.

Nicholson who wrote the Coimbatore Manual in 1887 states that "the invading vellalar, if from Chola, did not give the name of Kongu from their own, but took to themselves the name of the country in which they have settled (1887: 86)." Nicholson's observation finds an explanation in the first episode of the vamsavali text which indicates that the migrant vellala got their name from the Chera king to whom they were gifted as part of the marriage gift and the territory that they were settled in by the Chera king was also named after him.

Though the text does not give any date of this migration, this migration could have happened during the later Chola period around 10<sup>th</sup> century CE, because by then the Pallava rule declined and the Chola gained ascendancy and brought Thondai Mandalam under their control (Dirks, 1987).

## Theme 2: 24 nadu divisions of Kongu

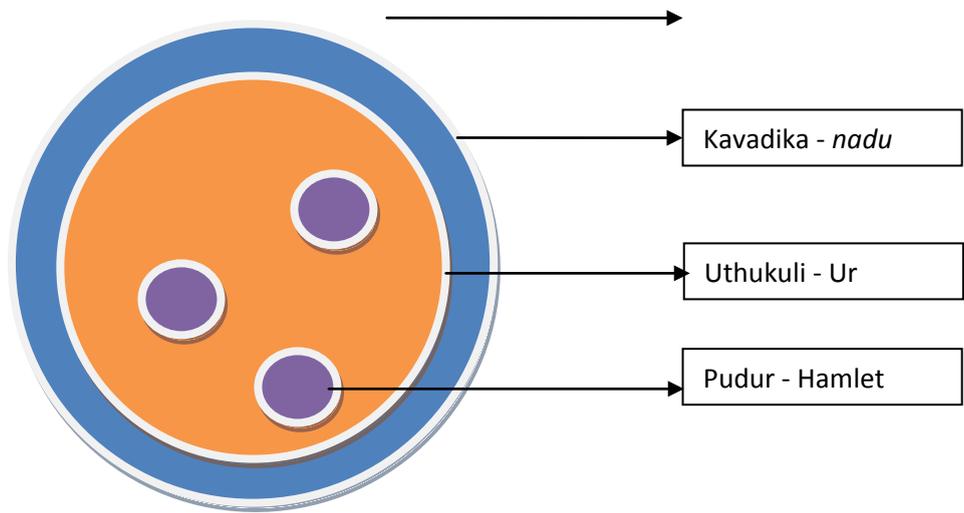
Nadu, as a territorial unit, existed from sangam period (300BC- 300AD<sup>6</sup>) where it was primarily used to indicate the macro territories such as Kongu Nadu, Chola Nadu, Chera Nadu and Pandya Nadu. In medieval times (800-1500CE), under the imperial chola regime, new administrative divisions were created and these units too were called as nadu, such as Kavadika nadu, Kangeya nadu. To distinguish the macro nadu units from the new nadu smaller units, the macro or older nadu territories were renamed as 'mandalam'. The micro nadu units were further divided into *ur* or village and the *ur* was further divided into hamlets, which is the smallest of all. These levels of territorial division are pictorially represented below (Diagram 1).

### Diagram 1 – Territorial Organisation of Kongu

<sup>6</sup> According to Champakalakshmi, the name of Kongu has been stretched from the Sangam period and even beyond. The date of the Sangam period continues to be a matter of debate among scholars.



Kongu Nadu /  
Mandalam



The migrant vellala did not arrive in a no man territory. This is recorded in a charter called '*Māntarañcēral Meykkīrti*' (Panegyric of Mantharan Cheral, a Chera king), which talks about how the vellalar subdued the earlier settlers. This charter is written in poem form, a part of its translation is given below (Rasu, 2007: 61-66).

Kongu was ruled by the Chera king Mantharan Cheral of Uthiyar branch (kiḷai). The five Vettuva communities Mavilavar, Poovilavar, Kavilavar, Vedar and Vettuvār were working as ministers for the Chera king. These communities migrated to Kongu, with the help of Pandya king Kottumuṭi Paṇṭyaṇ, and were living in Cherala ma nagar (big towns), Karuvur, Darapuram, Vilankil, and Mulanur. Chera king installed five Vellala leaders, *Elini*, *Kovan*, *Thithiyan*, *Maiyuran*, and *Porunan*, who were supportive of the Chola king, in the place of Vettuva leaders. This is linked to Chera king's marriage to Chola king's daughter. The five Vettuva leaders complained their loss to the Pandya king and he waged a war against the Chera king in support of the Vettuva. In this war the Vellala fought with the Chera and won the war.

### Theme 3: Kani an overview

The vamsavali texts state that migration of vellala mainly occurred to clear the forest and to bring more land under plough cultivation. The different vellala clans got their rights to plough a certain portion of nadu territory; this right over land is called kani rights. Some of the sources such as kani songs give the extent of the territory of the Kongu Vellala clans and/or of their chiefs clearly.

Kongu Vellalas are divided through clan (kūṭṭam) exogamy and caste endogamy. The clans are very important for their social life; from marriage alliances to everyday interaction clans play an important role. Any individual who belongs to Kongu Vellala identify themselves with their clan names and associated clan deity. As Manikam notes, “the peasants of Kongu, having totem groups, called kuttam, still use the terms kaniyatchi and kani teyvam (god) with reference to each kuttam” (2001: 377). Every clan has, apart from their kani deity, kani land (certain villages of a clan or their leader), kani bard and clan preceptor (kula guru) (Rasu, 2007: 196). The clan land or kani is where the particular clan originally settled when they migrated to Kongu. Kani means, rule or entitlement and the owner of kani land is called *kaniyalar* or *kāṇiyāḷa kavuṇṭar*. While Ludden prescribes the same meaning, “from the verb ‘to see,’ kani connotes close oversight over land and labour; in the course of time it came to mean ‘land,’ a measure of land, and ownership” (1985:39).

As per Tamil Lexicon kani means, “a land measurement (1.32 acres), landed property, right of possession and hereditary right” (1900, 859). In inscriptional sources, the term kani comes with additional terms which has multiple meanings, as stated by Abraham, ‘*kaniparru* (land holding), *kani vilai* (sale of kani right), *ulavukkani* (cultivation rights), *nirkkani* (right to water), *kani vetti* (land given for free labour rendered in construction of public works) and *kaniyatchi* (ownership or supervisory rights)’ (1988: 50). According to Karashima and Subbarayalu (1983: 141f), *kaniyatchi* means ‘hereditary right’, apart from right to land it can be applied for other things such as accountantship, headmanship, etc. They also state that the term ‘*kani* and *kaniyalar* are in use only in the later half of the chola rule’ (ibid, 1983). The introduction of kani rights also marks the shift from communal ownership to private property (Karashima, 1984).

The title kaniyalar included certain privileges as in, administering the village, collecting tax and payment to the government, right to control and demand labour from the subjects of the village, and finally to receive the first respects in the temple. (Rasu 2001:198). One of the charter called *Mukunṭa Nallur Kani Pṭṭayam*, affirms the privileges enjoyed by the kaniyalar. According to the the charter,

a kaniyalar (owner of the kani), can be a clan or a member (leader) of that clan, and enjoys complete authority over that particular kani (land or territory). Apart from charters, kani songs record these rights of a particular clan or a leader of the clan over a territory. Kani songs, usually composed by the kani bards of a particular clan, are of two types; first, lists the number of *ūr* (village) and the clan

which has kani rights over those *ur*. Second, it praises a leader of a particular clan who is the kaniyalar for the different *ur* listed in the song.

According to Rasu, 40 kani songs have been identified so far, and all of them indicate that the kaniyalar have complete rights over their land (2007: 198). Further, the clans associated with these kani songs continue to have their kani deity in their territory and relate the villages of their territory to their origin. The title and territory mentioned in the kani songs coincide with their details given in the vamsavali of the chiefs. The administrative reorganization carried out by later regimes creating palaiyams and even later zamin estates have followed the grouping of villages mentioned in the vamsavali and kani songs. This is evident from the sanad issued by the British in 1871. Both old and new records are consistent when it comes to the village names. This continuity is possible because kani territory were under the control of these chief for long and are also part of the memory and local knowledge of people. Interviews with clan elders carried out for this research underscore this point.

The kani song pertaining to **Kalingarayar (Sathanthai clan)** is given below

Kani Song	Name of the ruler, his clan and Kani villages
Koñkiñil kaliyukam cakāttanā lāyirattu Irunūrri ēlupattil Kulōttuñā cōlanum cērañum pāñṭiyañ Kulamatu vakukkumnāḷil Mañkaimaṇi cāttantai ulakilmañ rāṭikku Varicaippaṭ ṭamtarittē Mañṇukara varucamā vañiteti pattinil Vantacev vāyckiḷamaiil Kañkaikulak <b>kāliñka rayaveḷ lōṭṭuṭaṇ</b> Kañkayamvicaya mañkain-akaram Kāraitolu pālattuḷu allaḷa puramatil Kaṭakameṇum yāñaikattṭi Muñkaiyil cantañam uraittē vaṇaṇutavu Muntupet tāmakīpañ	In Kongu during kaliyugam (era) 4270 (4270-3101=1169CE <sup>7</sup> ), Kulothunka Cholan, Chera and Pandyan kings together segregated the clans and conducted coronation for three Saththandai clan members, on a Tuesday in Tamil year Kara, month of Aavani. The three clan members include <b>Ulakil Mandradi, Kalingaraya, Saravanan Manradi</b> . The poem further lists the following villages as their kani territory 1. Vellodu, 2.Kangeyam 3. Visaya mangalam, 4. Karathozhu 5. Palathozhu 6. Allapuram.

<sup>7</sup> Time periods stated as per the Tamil and other Indian calenders follow a calculation different from that used in the calculation of Common Era. However, one can derive at the year of the Common Era by adding or subtracting years from the Indian calender as given by Mani (1989).

Muṇaiperra tirumalai caravaṇmaṇ rāṭikku	
Muvarmuṭi cūṭṭiṇārkaḷē	

This song gives the details of coronation conducted for three persons who belong to Sathanthai clan, with their title as **Ulakil Mandradi, Kalinga Raya, Saravanan Manradi**. According to this kani song the coronation is conducted in the year 1169 CE. This time period can be correlated to the migration of the vellala during the Imperial Chola regime (848 CE-1279 CE). Further the song lists out a number of villages as their Kani territory, for Sathanthai clan members. As mentioned in the first episode of the vamsavali, Kalingarayar is the Kaniyalar of Vellodu village (in **bold** in the kani song).

The vamsavali of the Kalingarayar continues with the following portion

my ancestor (vamcattāṇ) Kalinga kavundan became Kaniyalar of Poonthurai nadu, and settler (kuṭi iruppukāraṇ) of Vellodu village which is one of the Melkari (upper bank) 32 villages of this nadu. He renovated the family deity, Sarveshwara Patakavalli Nachiyar, temple. (**Kalingarayar vamsavali – episode two**)

The episodes given above from Kalingarayar vamsavali, describes that, the first ancestor who migrated with other vellalas is Kalinga kavundan<sup>8</sup>, he got his kani rights of Poonthurai nadu<sup>9</sup>, and became Kaniyalar of that nadu. Then the text indicates that Kalinga Kavundan settles (*kudi iruppukkarān*) in the village of Vellodu. This village is one of the 32 villages of *mel karai* (upper bank) of Poonthurai nadu.

This nadu has one more division called *kil karai* (lower bank) Poonthurai nadu, this division too has 32 villages. Later, Kalinga Kavundan became nadu level ruler (*nāṭṭāṇ*) of Poonthurai nadu. After attaining the stage of nattan, Kalinga Kavundan constructs a temple for his desired deity (*ishta teyvam*) *Sarvesvara Padakavalli Nachiyar* and lived there.

#### Theme 4: Nadu head

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<sup>8</sup> Here in the text the hero is introduced with this name and again at the end of episode 2 it is stated that he got his name, Kalinga from incident when he followed the path of the snake for construction of the canal and dam. According to other palm leaf evidence (Kalingarayan Anai pattayam), his original name is Lingaiyan son of Nanchaiyan of Kanagapuram in Vellode.

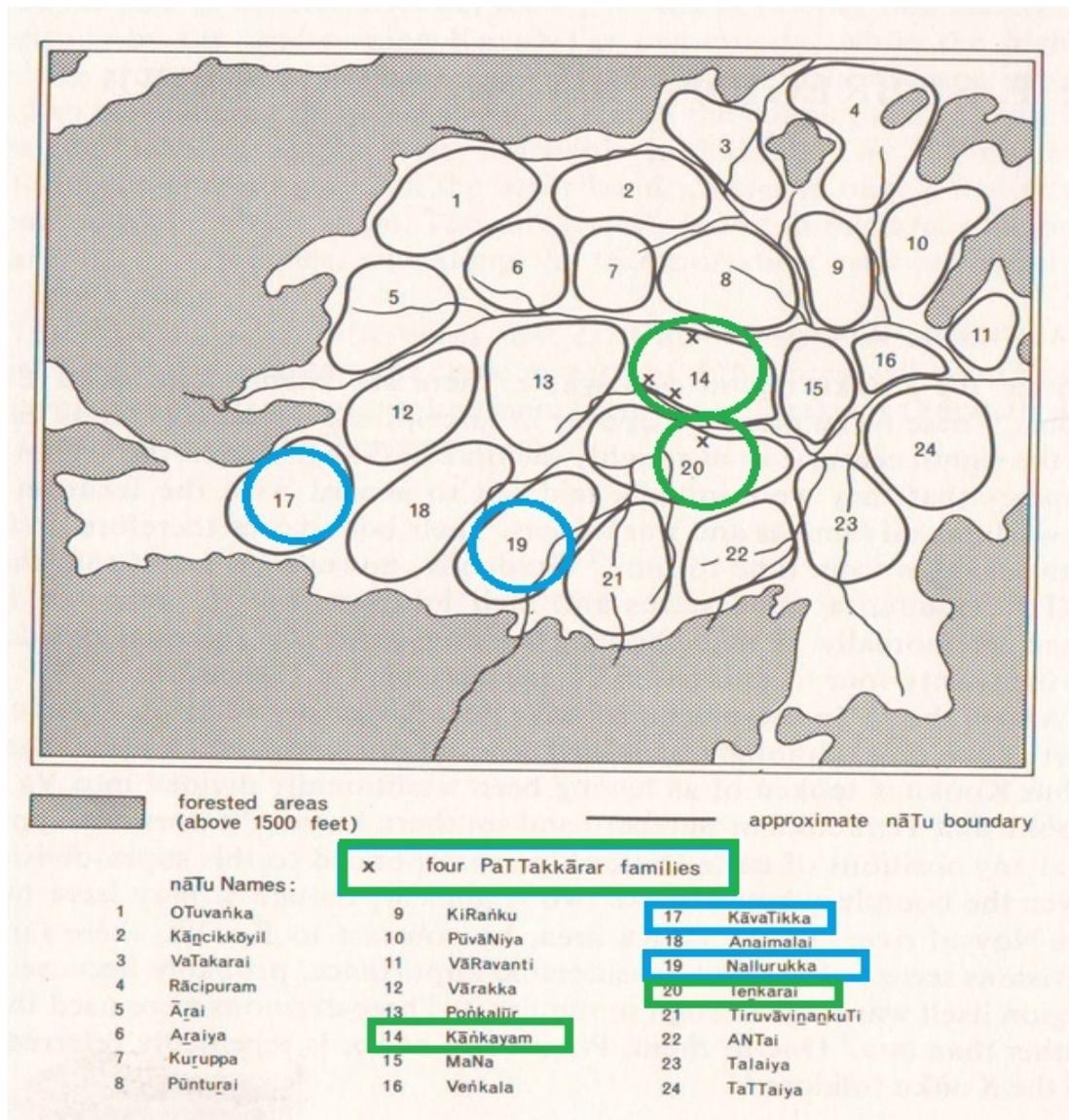
<sup>9</sup> One of the 24 Nadu's in Kongu see map 6 and the nadu number 8 for the location.

Kalingarayar becomes nadu kavundar of Poonthurai nadu along with 23 other chiefs who become heads of their nadu territory. The copper plate charter, '*Mathukarai pattayam*', shows this transition. A copy of this charter is available in the Epigraphy department of Tamil University, and published by Rasu (2007b).

This charter gives the details of how the three monarchs brought in the vellala to Kongu Nadu, gave them kani rights and created 24 nadu in Kongu. Once the 24 nadu is created the kings assign 24 nadu heads and demarcate their boundaries. The charter lists the 24 nadu names and their heads (see the table 7). The charter continues to talk about the vellala appointing potters to the 24 nadu, and agreeing to share their customs and practices with the potters. The charter identifies the potters as those who left Pandya country and their relatives to serve the vellala. So the vellala make an agreement with the potters that, "except in marriage alliance everything else will be the same for them". Then the charter gives details of the remuneration for the pots made for weddings and other festivals and also indicate the types of pots to be supplied for the Kongu vellala and other caste groups.

The date of the charter is difficult to determine, as the year mentioned in the charter does not corroborate with the details given in the vamsavali document. However, since the charter mentions the name of Thirumalai Nayaka whose regime is dated by historians at 1623–1659 CE, this charter must be written during or after this king's regime. However, this document gains importance because it gives the twenty-four nadu names and their heads (nāṭṭuk kavuṇṭarkaḷ). It is these nadu kavundars who are later redesignated as pattakkarars, discussed in the next theme.

### **Map 7 - Kongu mandalam with its twenty-four nadu division**



[Source: Brenda Beck, 1972]

## Theme 5: Leadership and achievement

The ancestor of Kalingarayar establishes his supremacy as Poonthurai nadu head by building a dam in his territory and thereby facilitating wet land cultivation for the people of his nadu. His individual effort or achievement helps the society to progress. Both these events, serving for the public or the king, helps the chief to establish a relationship with king and the people through which the chief enhances his influence in his territory. The vamsavali of Kalingarayar explicitly describes the story behind the construction of the dam, which is summarised below

After becoming a nadu head, Kalinga kavundan, (*note that the text refers to the chief as Kalinga kavundan and not Kalingarayar. This title is achieved later*) goes to his sister's house in **kodumudi**, situated on the banks of river Kaveri, to

propose a marriage alliance for his son with his sister's daughter. As he stayed overnight at his sister's place (in order to resume his journey back home in the morning), the cook asked his sister, what rice to cook for dinner. He overheard his sister reply, referring to him as coming from the land of kambu, millet (a dry land crop) growing region, and so he will not know to assess the quality of rice. She then instructs the cook to use the old rice. Hearing this, Kalinga kavundan feels insulted and challenges his sister that he will make his region a wet land as his sister's and cultivate paddy in it, only then he will resume the marriage proposal and eat in her house.

This episode gives details of Kongu geography, as explained in the previous chapter, except the riverine areas, all other parts of Kongu is a dry plain. The main subsistence of Kongu was based on dry crops like millets. As paddy is a water intensive crop, cultivation was possible only in the riverine areas. A recent excavation on Amaravathi river basin indicates this fact (Rajan, et al, 2013). Even until recently, when the green revolution changed this, Kongu's main subsistence came from millets. This does not mean that rice was not part of the household culinary but was consumed mainly at special occasions.

The above episode is important as building water ways or an irrigation system is one of the attributes or acts of kingship. While describing the chronicles of the Nayaka Kings, Dirks states that, "first acts of Kingship are to build a large new fort, construct temples and endow them with great munificence, establish many Brahman settlements, cause extensive irrigation canals to be built, create new villages, peopling them with new inhabitants, and in general increase the welfare, prosperity, and population of his new kingdom. This is what rajadharma is all about" (1987: 103).

The vamsavali text continues to explain how Kalinga kavundan succeeded in his mission.

Back at his village Kalinga kavundan thought of nothing else but the challenge to his sister. He prayed to his desired deity (iṣṭa teyvam) Sarveswarar, to help him succeed in his mission, to build a dam and the canal. At this time, he had a dream, in which a Brahmin advised him to dig the canal following the track of a snake. He immediately woke up and saw a snake in front of him, by seeing him the snake started moving, he followed the snake, making trails to identify the tracks of the snake, and finally it stopped at kodumudi. He decided to build the canal on the same track as the snake moved. Then as he wondered where to build

the dam to get water for the canal, he saw the snake, this time lying across the Bhavani river, just above Bhavani koodal (where Bhavani merges with river Kaveri).

He soon went ahead with his plan, he bought the lands near Orachi mountain with full payment to build the dam and the canal. As the dam was being constructed a Palaiyakkaran named, Vellai Vettuvan, of Orachi mountain claimed that the dam was being built on his land. Kalinga Kavundan won a battle with him and completed his mission. In fact, his name Kalinga was popularly bestowed on him after this incident, referring to the snake who is called Kalinga in an Indian myth. The other title kavundan<sup>10</sup> is used by all members of the vellala caste. As recognition to his leadership, the dam, canal and the rice cultivated in this water are all named after him.

From the time Kalinga kavundan committed himself for the above mission, he offered his prayer to the clan deity for the successful completion of his mission and as part of the prayer he vowed not to cut his hair. One day after his mission was complete, he was sleeping in his courtyard. His family barber on seeing him asleep, shaved and cut his hair without disturbing him. He then held a mirror to Kalinga kavundan's face and waited for him to wake up. When Kalinga kavundan woke up and saw himself in the mirror, he was very happy to see his new look and asked the barber what he wished for? The barber requested that his name be remembered by all. Upon this request Kalinga kavundan created a new village and named it as *Nasuvan* palaiyam (Nasuvan=barber) and donated it to the barber as a tax free land (*sarva maniyam*) on the southern side of his palaiyam. Deeds such as this further popularised (*pirasithi*) Kalinga Kavundan. He maintained (*paribalanam*) the dam and canal; settled in the village of Vellode and ruled (*nadathipathyam*) Poonthurai nadu. He lived with his children with the title, Kalinga kavundan.

A statue for Kalinga kavundan and the snake was erected on the dam and it is believed (and practiced) by the people of the region that veneration of both by conducting regular annual festival provides abundant water (*vellam*) facilitating good cultivation (*vellanmai*). They also believe that the dam is blessed by god Esvarar.

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<sup>10</sup> Kavundar is a corrupted version of the term Kamindan recorded in the inscriptions referring to agro-pastoral communities (Rasu, 2013:9).

The above episode gives various details which can be verified with other sources. First, Kalingarayan dam and canal exists even today with the same name, in Erode district of present Tamil Nadu. This dam is constructed on river Bhavani, at the site of Oratchi kottai (fort).

## Theme 6: Pattakkarar

Later a new designation termed Pattakkarar (*Pattam*- title; *karar* - holder), title holders was created by the three monarchs. This new designation is not given in the vamsavali text but in copper plate charter called '*Tiruccenkōṭu Eṭṭu Kulattār Ceppēṭu*', gives the details of this new designation.

With respect to the new designation the charter reads as follows

The three monarchs assembled the following people, Karalar of Narkudi forty-eight thousand; Pasunkudi twelve thousand; Eerkudi eight thousand; and brought in a new group of merchants and created twenty-four ***Pattakkarar*** for the twenty-four nadu and conducted coronation ceremony for them. These pattakkarars were empowered with authority to collect fine of seven measures of gold in case of crimes such as murder. The three monarchs then left to Kasi for their ritual bath in River Ganga.

The purpose of this designation seems to facilitate stricter policing in the region by decentralizing and empowering the pattakkarars. A strategy adapted by the three monarchs who were set to leave on a ritual pilgrimage. The charter also talks of a new class of merchants being brought into the territory and the introduction of clan preceptor. These introductions can also be read as balancing economic vibrancy with ritual control. All together adding further responsibility to the policing demands on the pattakkarar.

Given this context of enhanced authority for the pattakkarar, Kalinga kavundar for reasons not stated in the vamsavali felt that he was not treated as an equal by the pattakkarars. As a result, he moved from Poonthurai nadu (number 8 in map 6), his original kani to Kavadika nadu (number 17 in map 6), the current location of the chief. This episode from his vamsavali is given below.

Kalinga Kavundar, was famous after he constructed the dam and was ruling Poonthurai nadu (*nāṭātipattiyam* = nadu+adi+pathyam). At this time, the pattakkarars of the 24 nadu undermined his contribution of the dam construction

and refused to give equal status and respect to him. Disheartened by this, Kalinga Kavundar left Vellodu, his primary kani land, and moved to Kavidika nadu, which was given to his clan (Saththanthal) members by Cheramam Perumal (one of the Chera kings) in ancient times. He wanted to gain more status (*atika mariyatai*) than the other pattakkarars, so with this intention he later approached the Rayar dynasty.

It is important to note here the time period between the creation of the title pattakkarar by the three monarchs, the construction of the dam by Kalinga Kavundar and later his meeting with the Rayar king. Though the vamsavali and other relevant archival sources are not always clear on the time period, putting evidences available together stretches the period of these events to approximately 300 years. This then brings to question if Kalinga kavundan referred to in the vamsavali text is one individual or different generations of the individual who built the dam. These points are raised here as caution and to remind the reader that the purpose of this exercise is to understand the continuity in holding onto and achieving authority under the forces of its transformation and not in clarifying the chronology of local archival sources.

## **Theme 7: Palaiyakkarar**

### **Authenticating authority: Vijayanagar Empire (1336-1646)**

Insulted by the lack of respect for his deeds by the 24 nadu pattakkarar, Kalinga Kavundan approaches the Rayar king to legitimise his status to enable his due recognition from the pattakkarar. Status and honour achieved by an individual stands its ground only when legitimised by a superior authority.

In this time period it could be done only by a deity or King (Appadurai, 1977; Dirks, 1987). Given this understanding Kalinga Kavundan approaches the Rayar Dynasty.

Kalinga Kavundan waited for twelve years seeking appointment with the Rayar king. By this time all the wealth he took with him was exhausted. Though he was depressed he did not lose courage and waited in the periphery of the capital city (Penukonda) in a Kali temple and prayed to his family deity. On the 12<sup>th</sup> day, after twelve years, he had a dream, through which goddess kali told him that the king's son was suffering from mental illness, and instructed him to take the *vibhuti* (sacred ash) from her temple and rub it on the Rayar king's son. "This

would cure the Prince, and the king will be happy and you will be able to meet the king”. Blessed with this dream, after 12 days of starving and worshipping the deity, he followed the diety’s instruction and took the sacred ash and went to Penukonda city where he found the prince walking along the streets in his mental illness. Kalinga Kavundan prayed to kali and put the sacred ash on the prince who was cured of his illness and went back to the palace.

Devarayar, king of Penugonda instructed his ministers to bring the person who cured his son. When Kalinga Kavundan was brought to the king’s court, Rayar was happy to see him and asked him about his whereabouts and the purpose of his visit to Penukonda. He briefed the king of his deed in building the dam and canal and of the disregard shown to him by the 24 Nadu pattakkarar, his disheartened move to Kavidika nadu where he established villages, and his wish to gain status among the other pattakkarars and hoping Rayar’s intervention can legitimize a higher status. Rayar replied, ‘you saved my family by saving my son, so from now on your name will have my title too’. And he gave him the title **Kalinga Raya Kavundan**. Then the king asked him whatelse he wanted, he requested the king to grant him the *kaniyatci* of Kavidika nadu. Apart from sanctioning the territory, the king also granted him gifts of honor and emblems.

These gifts include, ornaments, and musical instruments (the list of things include *yali*<sup>11</sup>; *simahalla* palanquin; *upaya samaram*; *suruty*; *suriyapana alavattam*; *vellai kodai* – white umbrella; *paccha kodai*– green umbrella; *panchavarna kodai* – five coloured umbrella; etc). Rayar arranged for him to be taken around the city in a procession on the royal horse and conducted coronation ceremony, and announced that from that day he will rule Kavidika nadu till the sun and moon exist, through his lineage as a *mansabthar* (an official post in the Mugal rule). The king also appointed sixty-four **amarakarars** (soldiers and retainers) to assist him and gave him weapons including a double sword, *paccha eeti* (green javelin), *kari* (black) *eeti*, silver *eeti*, gold plated gun, silver plated gun. He achieved his status with the help of god and reached with the gifts bestowed on him by the king to his hereditary land of Kavidika nadu which is in the forested slopes of Anamalai Mountain. With his new title aided by god as

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<sup>11</sup> யாளி *yāli*: (page 3404) வரிசையாக அமக்கப்பற்ற கரேயிற் கட்டிடப்பசுதி . , n. <vyāla. [K. *yāli*.] 1. A mythological lion-faced animal with elephantine proboscis and tusks; யானையின் தந்தமும் தூதிக்கையூடுகிங்கத்தின் மூகமும் டயைதாகக் கருதப்படும்

well as by the king, he and his generation ruled for 592 years from *Sali vahana*<sup>12</sup> year 1120 to 1712 (1198 AD -1790 AD).

The above episode sets the ground for the chief to become a little king, where he obtains the recognition of the Sovereign of that time (Rayar Dynasty). With the royal gifts he establishes the relationship with royalty and becomes part of it. The gifts and emblems help in this transformation.

In the old regime, authority is bestowed by the superior kings to their subordinate chiefs, while the superior kings obtain their authority from gods (Appadurai, 1977; Dirks, 1987). The gift giving and receiving connects both the gift giver and receiver and the receiver by accepting the gifts becomes part of the sovereign as Dirks points out,

Like the relations of worship established in puja, the root political metaphor, political relations commence when a lesser king or noble offers service to a greater lord or king. They are "established" once the service is recognized in the form of gifts made by the superior to the inferior. The gifts include titles, emblems and honors, rights to enjoy the usufruct of particular lands, and/or the privilege to rule on behalf of the superior over a particular area. They are thus gifts of limited sovereignty. Sovereignty which is gifted, or shared, is always partial, and always represented as a part (not the whole) of the specific sovereignty of the overlord, (1987: 47).

The above episode gives the complete list of gifts which includes, territory, clear demarcation of its boundary, and the royal title acquired by the chief, besides the many symbolic material gifts of royalty. Through all this a new status is gained by the chief and his generations have ruled the territory of Kavadika nadu. Kalingarayar obtains a new title and is redesignated as palaiyakkarar, by accepting the sovereign's authority. But this relationship with the superior king is not eternal, at every time when the sovereign changes, the chief has to renegotiate and establish relationship with that sovereign, by his service. Once the chief comes under the umbrella of the superior, he abides to the rules set by the superior's system. The text indicates that from the 2<sup>nd</sup> till 8<sup>th</sup> generation, the Uthukuli palaiyakkarars of Kavadika nadu obeyed to the orders of the Rayar dynasty and ruled their palaiyam.

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<sup>12</sup> to get the Gregarian year, 78 years should be added to the Sali vahana year.

## Authenticating authority – Nayaka Dynasty (1529-1736)

After the Rayar dynasty, the text moves onto the Nayaka regime of Madurai. This episode gives details of the Nayaka king and how he established relationship with the local chiefs. One of the big achievements for Kalingarayar of this period is his appointment to guard the 51<sup>st</sup> bastion of Madurai fort. In Nayaka history it is considered as an important political move by the founder Viswanatha Nayaka and his general Ariya Natha Mudali to incorporate the local chiefs under their sovereign in order to aid in their control of them. The vamsavali below gives the details of this

During the 9<sup>th</sup> generation, the time of Nanchaya Kalingaraya goundar, Pandya throne came under the control of Viswanatha Nayakar. He called all the palaiyakkars of his dynasty for a meeting. At that time, in *Thirana valli* seermai of *Thatchina* (south) region, *Anchu* (five) raja had built forts (*Anchu kottai*) and ruled from there. They did not obey the overlord and created palaiyams in opposition. On the order of Nayakar, the 9<sup>th</sup> generation ancestor, Nanchaya Kalingaraya goundar went to Thirana valli and fought with Anchiraja and killed them and brought their heads to the Nayaka's court (text states *Sannithanam* – which is usually referred to the sanctum of a deity). Nayakar enthralled by this act appreciates his bravery and gifts him a head shaped trophy in gold along with other gifts and also gives him the panegyric '**Parakrama (brave) Nanchaya Kalingaraya goundar**'. He further instructs him to take charge of the 51<sup>st</sup> bastion of his Madurai fort. From that time till the 18<sup>th</sup> generation (Agathur Kalingaraya goundar) the men of Kalingarayar lineage obeyed Madurai regime's (*camaṣṭāṇam*) **karta** (Lord), 'Nayakar avarkal' and a generation of them instructed certain rules (*kattu pannina nikuthi padikku*) for governing our palaiyappattu.

The texts states, in the 'Nayakars *cannitāṇam*' – a term usually referred to the sanctum of a deity. So the relationship between the king and the palaiyakkarar is the same as the deity and the disciple (Dirks, 1987).

Through his service he attains a new title from the king that of 'Brave Nanchaya Kalingaraya goundar' and gifts include all discussed in the earlier episode with Rayar. The text notes as '*cakala vēkumati*' (all honours), besides receiving a head shaped *pirutu/viruthu* (trophy as honor) in gold. This time he is appointed as guardian of the 51<sup>st</sup>

bastion of the Madurai fort. This appointment is historically important in the incorporation of the chiefs in the Nayaka regime. As stated by Dirks,

According to traditions in other vamsavali as well as in texts concerning the Madurai Nayakas, Vicuvanata Nayaka, the first of the Madurai Nayakas who ruled from 1529 to 1564, built a large new fort as one of his first acts as king. As one chronicle tells the story: As many of the chiefs of the Tottiyar castes who had earlier served in battle under Nakama Nayaka had done the same under Vicuvanata, the latter divided his country into seventy-two palaiyams and then allocated one each to the chiefs, and then the king built seventy-two bastions on his fort in Madurai and allocated one each as well to the chieftains with the charge that they should defend the same with their soldiers against all attack. (Taylor 1835) This event is recapitulated in almost all of the vamcavalis of the palaiyakkarars (both Tamil and Telugu, in spite of the above text, which suggests that all the palaiyakkarars so incorporated were Tottiyars, a *Vatuka* caste). The recapitulations often include the number of the particular bastion allocated to the family in question (Taylor 1835: 160-67). This event thus established relations of service as well as symbolic incorporation between the Nayakas and the principal chiefs of the countryside. Each of the little kingdoms were thus metonymized in the bastions of the Nayaka fort (1982:677ff).

Until the 18<sup>th</sup> title holder, Agathur Kalingarayar, they were under the kingship of Madurai Nayakas and ruled their palaiyappattu with the instruction given by the samasthanam. From the time of 19<sup>th</sup> title holder, Virumanda Kalingarayar, the region was oscillating under the control of the Mysore Woodayar and the Nayakas of Madurai. This continued till the 23<sup>rd</sup> title holder Nanchaya Kalingarayar. During this period the Kalingarayar served both Mysore and Madurai regime.

This dual lordship indicates that Kongu is a warring field among these two regimes. The chronicles of the Nayaka indicate that during the regime of Thirumala Nayaka (1623-1659), there were many attempts by the Mysore regime to conquer Kongu country and succeeded to take certain portions where the King Thirumala had to send his army general Ramappaiyan to push Mysore army back to their territory (Taylor, 1835). However, Kalingarayar was affiliated to Nayaka regime until it was holding its power, when the Nayaka regime lost its hold, Woodayar regime of Mysore took over Kongu.

## Authenticating authority – Mysore Woodayar

During the 23rd title holder's time, Kongu went under the control of Mysore Woodayar's regime. Kalingarayar served the Mysore regime where he subdued the *Kodagu* (Coorg) chiefs and brought them back under Mysore control. For this service, Kalingarayar received gifts from the Mysore Woodayar. From that time till the 25th title holder, the Kalingarayars' obeyed and paid tribute to Mysore regime. The text reads as below.

23rd pattakkarar Nanchaya Kalingaraya Kavundan went to meet the Mysore ruler Immudi Raja Woodayar. At that time part of his region called *Kodagu* (Coorg) was governed by chiefs who refused to obey his orders. So Woodayar designated Kalingarayar to subdue the rebel chiefs and bring them under his control. Then Kalingarayar and his men fought the rebels and defeated them and brought them under Woodayar's control.

Satisfied with this service, the Mysore ruler gave gifts such as garments and ornaments to Kalingarayar. He also extended rights to rule the nine villages under Uthukuli palaiyapattu with the fixed tribute of *Rasa gobali* (currency of that time) 170 Panam *Nikuti* (duty paid by village watchmen for enjoyment of their privileges). From then till the 25th title holder, Agathur Kalingaraya Kavundar period, we obeyed the orders of Mysore rulers and ruled our palaiyam.

The vamsavali further gives details of their rule, the strength of their army, their endeavours in subduing their own enemies and also of the king's. They also talk highly of their fort in Uthukuli during this time.

From ancient times my lineage members who ruled palaiyapattu were elite and courageous people. They have stationed at Uthukuli fort an army of 5000 foot soldiers, 100 horses, 5000 armed soldiers and one *kaṭakam*<sup>13</sup> (army) of elephants. With this army at different periods, we have subdued those who did not obey the kings and our own enemies. In the Anamalai hills, we have captured elephants for the king's palace. As per the palace order, we had the kaval (police) rights of

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<sup>13</sup> **கடகம்<sup>2</sup>** kaṭakam - , n. < kaṭaka. 1. Bracelet, armllet; கங்கணம். கடகஞ் சடுந்த கயை (மணி . 6, 114). 2. (Nāṭya.) A gesture with one hand in which the tips of the thumb and of the forefinger are joined together and the other three fingers are held upright; பரெவ ரலஞ் சட்டவ ரலம் வளந்தை ஒன்றோடொன்ற உகிரகவவ மற்றை மூன்றவ ரல்களம் நிமிர்ந்தநிற்கும் இணையா வினக்கை (சிலப் 3, 18, உர) 3. Circle, ring, wheel; வட்டம். (பிங்.) 4. Shield; கடகம். (திவா.) 5. Army; படலை. (பிங்.) 6. Fortified wall; மதில். (பிங்.) 7. Cuttack, the capital of Orissa; ஓர் தலநைகரம். (தமிழ்நா. 223.) 8. Mountrain in side, ridge of a hill; மலைப்பக்கம். (பிங்.) 9. A river; ஓர் நதி. (பிங்.)

Anamalai and Mariachi Nayagan Palaiyam where the payment collected from the subjects for kaval was split equally between the king and us. Tax was also collected for goods transacted in our area. The taxes were collected and enjoyed by us while we paid the tribute fixed by the palace.

#### **Authenticating authority - Hyder and Tipu**

Woodayar regime was taken over by their army general Hyder Ali at the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century (1761CE) and his son Tipu Sultan succeeded him to the Mysore throne in 1782CE. Tipu Sultan aimed to bring Mysore and the Tamil region under his control. But before succeeding in this mission he died (1799CE) in war against the British EIC. During his time, palaiyakkarars were pressed to pay a huge sum as tribute and this pushed them into hardship.

Further, according to Kalingaraya vamsavali, tax collection was stopped and kaval rights restrained giving rise to problems of thieves. All this resulting from Tipu Sultan's, 'highly extractive and interventionist systems of revenue collection and administration' (Dirks, 1987:20). Reducing the extent of tax free lands, they burdened the palaiyakkarar with the land taxes. This point is indicated at the beginning of their annual report (1911-12) where their estate was reduced from 10000 acres to 9000 acres.

#### **Theme 8: British East India Company: Redesignation as Zamindar**

After the defeat of Tipu Sultan in the year 1799, in the fourth Mysore war, the whole of Kongu fell in the hands of the EIC. This last episode is written and added to the Kalingarayar vamsavali at the advent of EIC's arrival. The rest of the text might be composed earlier to this period, as pointed out by Dirks (1982). In this last episode, the palaiyakkarar writes to the new sovereign to recognize his authority.

Kaliyugapudam 4811 (4811-3101=1710 CE) *Mel Sella Ninra* year (without moving; same year) Viroda Kiruthu, month of Masi, on the 4<sup>th</sup> day, I was coronated and named as Kumarasamy Kalingaraya Kavundan. At a time when I was troubled by small thieves, during the Tipu Sultan regime, I was very happy to hear that Maha Raja Raja Shri Cumpini Lord (East India Company) is becoming the ruler. I have left my children in Bombay and am waiting in Uthukuli for the Company Lords attention to my plight. In the *Siddirarthi* year, Maha Raja Raja Shri Palakkattu fort Major Commander Semiduramali Sayapu avarkal; Maha Raja Raja Shri Bombay Pavusthars head, Lord Sidhiyettu Sayapu avarkal; Maha Raja Raja Shri General Adly Sayapu avarkal; all have approved

and blessed me and I have reciprocated their patronage obediently gaining further their complete confidence in me.

Maha Raja Raja Shri Cumpini Lord blessed and saved my honour, and I have been given permission to rule the nine villages which belongs to Uthukuli. I was allowed to retain my weapons and rule my Palaiyam as Uthukuli palaiyakkarar, except retaining (*sathasvar sipanthi*) armed peons. I was instructed to pay a tribute of 7/10 to the government and retain 3/10.

With Maha Raja Raja Shri Cumbini (company) lord's blessings and promising to obey with the name of Kumarasamy Kalinga Raya Kavundan. In my lineage name and for next generations I will obey to the lord and Maha Raja Raja Shri Company Lords orders I will do my best. The Palaiyakkarar signed at the end of the document.

The EIC continued to wage wars against the rebel Palaiyakkarars of southern country from Madurai to Thriunelveli. During this time, EIC asks the help of Kalingarayar in subduing the Company enemies. For which there was a letter written to Kalingarayar by the Major Commander of Palakottai fort, James Ramali, who asks the Kalingarayaras to help and be cordial with the Company government, in return, the higher Company officials at Bombay will install him back in position. This letter acknowledges the difficulties of Kalingaryar, his troubles at the time of Tipu. But the letter is also conditional stating that, only if Kalingaryar abides to the EIC he will be relieved from his miseries. Kalingarayara abides to this letter and helps the Company. This change is recorded in the vamsavali, where he expects the new regime to help him.

This letter dated on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1798, written by Major Commander of Palakottai fort, James Ramali to Uthukuli Kalingaraya Kavundar (GOML Document no- D 3045) is given in brief below. The letter starts with an extensive panegyric used to address Kalingaraya Kavundar. It states,

‘Śrīmaṇ cakalakuṇ campaṇṇarāṇ cakalatarma pirīti pālakaṇāṇ pantucaṇa cīntāmaṇiyaṇāṇa akaṇṭita laṭcumi piracaṇṇaṇāṇa vekucaṇa parīalakaṇāṇa nittiyā taṇa vinōtarāṇa makāmēruvukku caricamāṇa tīraṇāṇa makā la la śrī Ūttukkuḷi Kalīṅkarāyak Kavunṭar avarkaḷukku rajamaṇiya rajaśrī pālakkāṭṭuk kōṭṭai mēcar kamāṇṭar Jēmcu Ramalī cāyapu avarkaḷ meta meta calām’.

This greeting above can be roughly translated as, ‘Lord of all good qualities, all justice, a man of friendship, a gem of his relatives, blessed by divinity, protector of his subjects, eternal giver, the exceptional, equal to the mountains, the brave, great lord Uthukuli Kalingaraya Kavundar to thou, Sovereign, the lord, Major Commander of Palakottai fort, James Ramali, greatly salutes’

The main content of the letter states that, three main company officials from Bombay asked James Ramali to convey their happiness to Kalingarayar for his work. They also asked him to be friendly with English company government. Ramali suggests to Kalingaryar, that he with his other Kavundar relatives and friends obey the company sarkar (government). If they obey the company government, they will facilitate and approve his rule. Ramali proposes a set of different expectations of the EIC from Kalingarayar, he could as per his convenience help the EIC in subduing their enemies in Palakat or in Dindugal or in Palani. Once Kalingarayar accepts and helps EIC as proposed, the three officials will reinstall him to his earlier status.

Here we have on one side, the letter from the EIC Major Commander to Kalingarayar asking for alliance and cooperation, promising in return, support in reinstallation of his authority. On the other side, we have a letter from Kalingarayar seeking the support of EIC, having been ravaged by Tipu Sultan’s administrative strictures. Given the mutuality of support and alliance sought, Kalingarayar, as with the other Kongu Vellala chieftains abide to support the EIC. This is the situation until the 28<sup>th</sup> Palaiyakkarar, Agathur Kalingaraya Kavundar. The vamsavali stops with 28 generations of chiefs and the 29<sup>th</sup> title holder is the one who submits the vamsavali text to Colonel Colin MacKenzie and his team.

#### **Theme 9: Post 29<sup>th</sup> title holder and the end of the Kalingarayar vamsavali submitted to MacKenzie:**

Since the writing of this vamsavali which stops with the 29<sup>th</sup> title holder, it is important to note that the descendants have continued to commission the reproduction and updation of this vamsavali till date. The details of the Kalingarayar title holders, from the 29<sup>th</sup> to 35<sup>th</sup> has been documented in Vadivelu’s book, ‘The Ruling Chiefs, Nobles and Zamindars of India’ (1915) and reproduced in part by the descendants for distribution and display. These booklets record that, the reinstallation of authority under the EIC came with the redesignation of the title and territory. The palaiyam system was

replaced by the zamindari system in 1803 and the palaiyakkarar were redesignated as zamindars.

**Muthu Ramasamy Kalingarayar**, the son of the 34<sup>th</sup> title holder took charge as the 35<sup>th</sup> generation of title holder in the year 1936. He held this post for 33 years, till his demise in 1969. His long years in office saw important political shifts starting with the British Raj and the zamindari, then serving independent and republic India as landed gentry under the ryotwari system. The 36<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> generation are the present title holders and oversee the valorisation of the titles through collective memory.

## Conclusion:

This paper set out to trace the origin, continuity and transformation of authority of the Kongu Vellala chieftains. It has done so using largely the vamsavali of Uthukuli Kalingarayar Kavundan along with other archival sources as in palm leaf and copper plate charters, stone inscriptions, and sanads. Though the paper has attempted to use these sources in chronology, the main focus is to bring out an ethnohistorical narration of the context and actors in understanding the power behind authority. Using the above sources, the narration spans from the reign of the three south Indian monarchs, Chera, Chola and Pandya, from around 300CE to the reign of Vijayanagara empire (1336-1646), to the Madurai Nayakas (1529-1736), the Mysore Woodayars (1553-1761), Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan (1761-1799), to British East India Company (1800-1858), to the Crown rule (1858-1947) and its end with the Independence of India (1947).

The purpose of this long historical span is to focus on the origin and achievement of some Kongu Vellala members in gaining prominence through their valour and also divine intervention in becoming local heads and over time scaling up the territory under their control and consolidating the legitimacy of their titles through patronage from every changing ruling regime. Throughout the narration of the vamsavali and other sources there is an attempt in constructing their identity along lines of **valorisation** (agrarian skill, construction of dam, subduing rebel chiefs, taking control during epidemics, introduction of schooling, electricity, etc.), **blessed by divinity** (episodes of the goddess guiding the chief through dreams both for the dam construction and in curing the Prince of Vijayanagar empire), and **royal patronage** (receiving royal titles, emblems, insignia and other gifts along with territory, and panegyric address).

As stated at the beginning of this article, In the democratic political structure, there is no position of authority that resembles that of the chieftains. The independent democratic

state has progressively nullified the authority of the chieftains. The vacuum created in this position of authority has not been replaced by an equivalent (Quigley, 2005: 1). By this statement, I am referring to an authority simultaneously in-charge of administration of an equal territory with powers of legal defence (police, army) and revenue. And even more importantly, an individual who holds authority based on a legacy of valour, largesse and ritual status. (Maurice [1941] 1992: 123)

Given this reality, a situation arises where the loss of chiefly authority has been unchallenged by an equal authority and therefore by default the legacy survives and continues even without a favourable ordinance through the practice of collective memory. The paper justifies this argument, through the conscious effort made by the chieftains till date in valourising the vamsavali and related evidences. It is important, therefore to look into the contents of the vamsavali to understand the creation and legitimacy of chiefly identity

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