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Guild System in Kongu Country

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Abstract

Guild system was in vogue from the ancient India period in right from Sangam age it had existed in Tamizh country. Guild was an organization of particular professionals. Carte was the primary consideration for the admission of a person as member in the guild. Occupation was also another criteria for membership. Vigneswara, a medieval lawgiver defined sreniyah (gold) of persons earning their livelihood by the same kind of labour though belonging to same caste or different castes. Medieval Kongu saw the emergence of many professional castes. These castes had their own guilds. These guilds played a vital role in social economical and political spheres.

Keywords: Guild System, Kongu, Sangam Age.

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Introduction

Guild system was in vogue from the ancient India period in right from Sangam age it had existed in Tamizh country. Guild was an organization of particular professionals. Carte was the primary consideration for the admission of a person as member in the guild. Occupation was also another criteria for membership. Vigneswara, a medieval lawgiver defined sreniyah (gold) of persons earning their livelihood by the same kind of labour though belonging to same caste or different castes. Medieval Kongu saw the emergence of many professional castes. These castes had their own guilds. These guilds played a vital role in social economical and political spheres.

From 12th century onwards many guilds had been referred in inscriptions. More than ten guilds were active in social and political life of MedievalKongu¹. Even in Sangam literatures guild is mentioned by 'nigama'. Kodumanal excavations yield a pot-sherd inscription about 'nigama'². It had corrupt form in literature as 'niyamum'. Padirrupathu refers two times about this 'niyamum'³. Early medieval and medieval inscriptions speak about different types of guilds here. These guilds must be studied in correct historical perspectives. From 9th century onwards many guilds were mentioned such as Athikosam, Veerakosam, Nanadsi, Inooruruvar, Nagaram, Manikramam, Kammalas, Carpenters, Valanchiyar and gold smiths. Also Nimonthakaras (Temple Servant) dancing girls, Brahmins, Sheperds, Puluvas and Vellalas had their own

guilds. At the end of the period, under study some military organizations has constituted their own guilds.

Athikosam & Veerakosam

These two guilds are mentioned in an inscription from Nallur in Periyar District⁴. Some scholars opine that they were traders in elephant and horses⁵. Others opined that they might had represented the elephant army and horse army⁶. Another inscription from Anaimalai represents these guilds. Pulankuruchi inscription is the earliest inscription which mentions about Athikosam guild⁷. Kongu epic Perunkadhai also refers to it⁸. On 9th century inscription from Kerala (Thiruchur District)⁹ mentions about Athikosam. All the inscriptions about Athikosam and Veerakosam were located on the ancient highways. This aspect confirms that Athikosam and Veerakosam represented the traders as well as army of respective division¹⁰. Athikosam, Veerakosam guild inscriptions have the symbols like sickle, sword, plough, agricultural implements, elephant and horse¹¹. These reveal the fact that Athikosam and Veerakosam were in collaboration with Vellalas and army men.

Traders Guild

Nanadesi are mentioned in inscriptions from Brahmiyam, Ponnivadi, Pattanam and Verapathi¹². These show their influence over Kongu region. Also Inooruruvar, Nagaram, Nadu, Valanchiyar and Manikkramam had their own guild. These guilds had leaders who acted on behalf of the guilds. Pattanaswami, Dandanayaka, Venika, Chakravarthi and Manradi¹³. The terms were denoting community leaders and heads of town. The common opportunities for collective action were those occasion when the guild, acting together

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decides that each member should pay some and matas. Sarkar Periyapalayam inscription is the best example for this¹⁴.

Chirameli guild ordered that the merchant of Mugundhanur must give certain amount per unit of article in which they traded. Weavers cum traders from Thuravalur (Bhavanisagar) had agreed to give taxes to temple¹⁵. An inscription from Sevrur mentions about tax levied by oil monger guild of Vedaparicaranadu from Oilmonger community¹⁶. Ayyavole from Vadaparicaranadu was a powerful guild. Among these guilds, the guild of Ayyavole (Aimpolil) occupies a prominent place, in the records of the period. The guild finds mention in more than fifty inscriptions in South India¹⁷. The spatial distribution is to be notified. They spread all over South India. The earliest reference to it is in a Kanavese inscription of 8th century A.D. from Aihole¹⁸. It covers the largest province from the Kolahapour in North and Coimbatore in South as well. Ayyavole was everywhere the best of cities and its lords were invariably five hundred.

Artisans were organized in guilds. Kammalas, Carpentors and temple architects had their own guild organizations¹⁹. Inscriptions from perur, Kozhumum and Kadathur had mentioned about Kammalaguild in South Kongu²⁰. Also an inscription from Karur and Vellode have referred to Kammala guild of Vengulanadu and Poondiurainadu²¹. No inscriptional evidence for guild of carpenters in Kongu is noticed so far. But land-grant was given to them in Kongu the King themselves²². Nimandakaras (temple) referred to as Chitramelinattam and Chitramelithattan²³. Some temple had been named as Chitrameliswaram²⁴.

Agrarian integration and consolidation of Vellalas led into emergence of Chitrameliperianadu. Agrarian integration was intensified in Kongu country in 12th to 13th century²⁵. This intensification resulted in the emergence of Supra-local organization. During 13th century Chitrameliperianadu had emerged as sole authority in political and social integration²⁶. They administered taxes and judicial institution. King's authority had gone in to back ground. Many inscriptions mention the King's name for name sake only. King had never consolidated his authority over Chitrameliperianadu. In fact Chitrameliperianadu acted only in its independent capacity. The authority of fixing the tolls, commission share of the town etc., was exercised by it²⁷. The lord of the union of the guild was the fact that members followed the same occupation.

Origin

All the guilds have their own origin myths, Rathakaras of South India had put forth in temple at Uttarrattur in Lalgudi (T.K) it says. "In order to kill the demons (that desturned) the sacrifices of Ksyapa (the priest of Visvakarma patron god of artisans) we were made to appear from the Agnikunda (sacrificial firepit) and while we used this protecting the said sacrifice Chakravarthin Avindhama honored the officiating sage

priest by carrying them in a car and them to the Brhamana colony (nearly founded by himself)²⁸. On this occasion we were made to take our seats on the back of the car and to carry the slippers and umbrellas of these sages".

Importance of Guild

All the artisan castes have their own orgin myths. But our concern is about the emergence of guild in Medieval Kongu. For the consolidation of agrarian integration, the iron smith and carpenter were indispensable ones. For agricultural implements these two artisans were necessary. This led to the prominence of these artisans. Also temple building activities were intensified. This temple construction had made stone cutter and sculpter to migrate and settle in particular places for sometimes. Most of the town in Kongu were populated by these artisans. In course of time the population of artisans had increased and outnumbered. At this juncture guilds of artisans came to beings. Madhava, a 14th century jurist says, "At times when some harm occurs to the grama, companies of artisans, the peasants and the Naigamas as well as in good times when dharma is performed, the removing of the Dharma as well as the performance of dharma are not possible without all agreeing to one course of action"²⁹.

Guild as Court

Guild was given a recognized local status. It could act as law courts to decide cases. In the association, the directions given by those who were competent to advice as to the interests of the association should be followed by others who were incorporated as members³⁰. Guilty were furnished by the guilds. The trial was meticulously conducted by the Guild and Judgment passed³¹.

Spatial Distribution

The boards of unity among the members of a guild were of vested character, the common occupation being only one of them. First there was the tie of locality members of the same guild lived move or less in the vicinity. The oil mongers of sevrur and Vadaparicaranadu met in the temple and decided³². Here apparently, the guild of oil mongers was spread in and around Sevrur. The carpenters, black smith temple servant were in the same locality.

Privileges

Another kind of unity arose from the attempt to secure some privileges for the body of its members. These privileges, as they have come down to us, were in the main social. An inscription records a royal charter granted to Kammalas of South Kongu content of the charter is following;

"We have ordered that from the months of Adi of the 15th (year of our reign), at your marriages and funerals, double conches may be blown and drums etc., beaten that Sandals may be worn (on the way) to places

which you have to visit and that your houses may be covered with plaster. Can the authority of this written order (olai), this may be engraved on stone and on copper in all places desired by you. So as to last as long as the moon and the sun³³.

Similar orders of privileges were engraved in temples at Karur and Vellore. Craft production was perhaps more intensive in the Kongu region, where 12th and 14th century inscriptions indicate large scale artisan activity and participation in important civic duties which conferred special privileges upon them. Privileges were collectively granted to the Kammala community³⁴. Agreements among artisan communities for various purposes also became common during the period³⁵. Some kind of craft organization, at least among the artisans of a specific region was perhaps emerging by the 13th century. However, their independence on merchant organizations is underlined in an inscription of late 11th century from Erode, where the Nanadesi organization set up a refugee center for the artisans³⁶.

In medieval Kongu the guild system had existed. It had emerged as powerful authority during 12th and 13th century A.D., presence of large numbers of guilds here had characterised the medieval Kongu as “shatter Zone” in South Indian Social Context. Kings had recognized the guild as autonomous administrative units. Also it acted as agency between king and society. Various dynasties had merged powerful and short lived. But the guild system had its sway over South India for about eight hundred years (800 years).

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