

## **Economic and religious transparency of the Tamil trading community revealed in the Viharahinna inscription in the twelfth century AD.**

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### **Abstract**

Viharahinna can be identified as a place that was revered by the Hindu Buddhist people in the twelfth century AD. In accordance with the political and economic patterns prevailing in Sri Lanka at that time, various allowances were given to this temple by the Tamil trade organizations. In each case, they have seized it, despite obstacles we can scarcely imagine. What we need to understand here is that the people of South India once acted with transparency in Sri Lanka, providing protection to the Sinhala King as the merchants, security forces and administrative officers.

Keywords- merchant guilds, Viharahinna, Indian Ocean, trade

### **Research aim.**

Identifying the Sri Lankan role of Tamil trade hierarchies in the Bay of Bengal trade flow.

### **Research Question.**

Although is there a separate identity in Sri Lanka for the Tamil merchant guilds revealed in the Viharahinna inscription?

This archeological site called Viharahinna is located in a very fertile and beautiful land consisting of lakes in the dry zone not far from the center point of the map of Sri Lanka. From this place you can easily reach Polonnaruwa, Dambadeniya, Sigiriya and the west coast. Turn left at the Galewela clock tower junction on the Kurunegala-Dambulla Main road and travel 9 km along the road to Kalawewa. Turn left at the junction and proceed along the Dewahuwa reservoir to reach the sanctuary complex. The Viharahinna archaeological station is located in the village of Moragolla near the North Central Provincial Boundary of the Matale District. This inscription, identified by

the Department of Archeology, was published by A. Velupillai in 1971 (Velupillai, 1971). There were ambiguous places due to copying problems of this inscription. However, a team of Japanese scholars, including Noboru Karashima, who visited Sri Lanka in August 1997, read the inscription very clearly and copied and recorded it by using modern technology (Sabbarayalu and Shanmugam 2002,249). Professor Pathmanathan, who worked with this group of scholars and represented the University of Peradeniya, submitted a commentary on this inscription in 1998 (Pathmanathan, S., 1998-1999, 1112-121).

The old name of this temple is known as "*Agni Giri Vihara*" (Ranavalla, S.2005,94). It is clear from the legends of the area that this is the place where Prince Dutugemunu met his mother Vihara Devi on his way to battle with Elara. Accordingly, this place has been named as Viharahinna after his mother. Gamalath's doctoral dissertation states that Viharahinna is a variant of the Aramaic design found in public temple complexes designed according to the Maha Vihara system (Gamalath 2016). He further points out that monastic organizations with such sub-panchayats are common in royal monasteries such as the Abhayagiri, Jetavana, Mirisawetiya and the Maha Vihara (Gamalath,ibid). At present the main aramaic feature of the Viharahinna Sangarama is the sub-Panchayatana Pirivena system. This is a special kind of Bhikku monastery which originated in the Abhayagiri Viharaya belonging to the Mahayana *Dharmaruchi sect* and developed in temples such as the Jethawana Viharaya and Mihintale as well as in Mirisawetiya. According to their utility, Viharahinna is based on the features of three image houses, Currently two of them have been excavated and conserved while the unexcavated building can also be believed to be an image house. It has been mentioned earlier that the *Panchayatana* aramaic spatial organization is found in the No. 2 image house complex of the Jethawana vihara and in the bhikkhu residential courts of the Abhayagiri vihara as well as in Mihintale and Mirisawetiya. (Gamalath 2016) We have discussed at length in terms of its sculptural and architectural features that the methodology of the Viharahinna Sangarama dates back to the fifth century AD (Gamalath 2016). It is clear that their patronage of lighting with the help of the Tamil community dates back to the 10th century. It is clear that this place has inevitably been absorbed into the Mahayana genre. Due to the Tantric influence of the Mahayana, objects related to Hindu worship have been deposited and used in the temple complex. This will be very clear from the Tamil inscriptions and architectural constructions.

According to the inscription, taxes were granted to the temple by the merchants of the trading town of *Masēnagāmam* allies “*Tanmasāgara-paṭṭānam*”. The installation of this inscription in the temple shows the connection between the temple and the trading town. Also, the inscription has been installed in the temple so that the people who come to the temple can see it. Karishima speculates that the inscription dates to 1150 AD (Karashima 2002). By this time, the reign of King Vijayabahu the Great (1055-1110) had come to an end and the Chola, Pallava and Pandyan communities in southern India were becoming somewhat involved in the administration of Ceylon through trade groups and soldiers. The reign of King Parakramabahu I the Great (1153-1186) who came to power in 1153 AD is even more significant here. However, sources record that not only the Tamil soldiers but also the merchant guilds interfered in the internal trade of Sri Lanka during the Polonnaruwa period. This may be due to the fact that Viharahinna is located in the center of the road network that runs through the North East and North Western Provinces of Sri Lanka and is located at a unique junction on the way from the South to the North.

The eulogy of the Viharahinna inscription states that they possessed 500 charters called *Vira-Sasana*, were brave, who are adorned by *Lakshmi*, who carry on their *Samaya-dharma*, and transacted in eighteen *paṭṭānam* (costal area), thirty-two *vēlāpura* (ports) and 64 *katikait-tāvalam*. And also the trading community mentioned here belongs to the lineage of *Vasudeva*, *Kandali* and *Moolabhadra*. An examination of the Kandali dynasty mentioned in the inscription reveals that during the reign of *Hyun Shu* of China (454-464 AD) there was a Malay island kingdom in the South Seas called *Kandali*, which sent an ambassador and gifts to the Chinese emperor (Annual Report on the Federation of Malaya: 1957). However, this is clear evidence that this Kandali area existed in the vicinity of the Malay Peninsula. The Kolhapur Inscription in Maharashtra, India, refers to *Vasudeva*, *Kandali* and the *Moolabhadra* race as having "unparalleled heroism". (Srinivaunions, R, A, ) These trades write in inscriptions about the fame they have acquired, the superiority of the lineage, and the virtues. For example, Vira Bananjas of *Ayyavole* was born in the *Vasudeva* dynasty. They have made sure to introduce the trade community from the very beginning of the inscription to reveal the heroism of the Kolhapur inscription as well. Accordingly, it is clear that Vasudeva mentioned in the Viharahinna inscription is a family name and if we interpret who they are, they are "heroic Valaṅceyar with shining long spears".

Their transparency is particularly evident in the fact that trade ranks have sponsored religious institutions in a country, donating a portion of their profits. Thus, historians have differing views on their activities. In some cases, they were a specially trained military organization. Neelakanta Shastri states that the *Valañceyar* were an increasingly stable and reliable military organization in the royal service (Sastri 1993:454). They were always trades as well as the king's warriors. According to the Tamil dictionary, "*velai*" means extremely loyal servants. Also, "*velai*" means work, servant and slave (Madras Tamil Laxicon), and another definition of workers' army. Also, the word "*veil*" meaning "*spear*" (ibid) makes it even clearer that it is a "mercenary force". Many inscriptions mentioning this travel trade organization are found in South India and the Kongunadu inscription can be cited as an example. The Thittandanapuram Inscription in the Ramnath District is a significant indication of Valangier's support in southern Sri Lanka (ARE, 1926-27,93), indicating that trade groups and textile manufacturers, including the Valangier trade community in Sri Lanka, attended this special meeting.(ibid)

According to the Viharahinna inscription, *Valanjiyar* traders came from eighteen Pattanagama (*pattana*), thirty-two coastal areas (*vēlāpura*) and 64 markets (*katikait-tāvalam*). The *patineṅpūmi-vīrar* mentioned in the Viharahinna inscription is a trade group with connections to 18 countries. This group also includes *kandiyamuttu vīrar* traders. The Viharahinna inscription states that "they arrested our companion *mudavalan muttan* alias *Nanādēsiyān dān* and put him in chains" and the arrest was made by *Vēṅādudaiyār*. (Sabarayalu and Shanmugam 2002: 251) It is important to comment on the *Perumakkal* so-called great government officials as mentioned in the inscription. It further states that while the *Perumakkal* or government officials were highly respected, a man named *Mu ... valan muttan* alias *Nanādēsiyān*, who was like the brothers of the *Valanjiyar*, was arrested by *Vēṅādudaiyār* and chained and rescued by paying ransom money. About twenty years before this period, an inscription in India mentions the name of *Vēṅādudaiyār*, an official of the Chola king of Kulothunga III alias Veera Rajendra Deva (1178-1218) (ARIE 1914). This struggle, as indicated in the Viharahinna inscription, is linked to the Chola-Pandyan civil struggle that is currently taking place in India. At the time of the inscription, the Chola ruler was Rajaraja II (1146-1173). This inscription was written by Tamil traders during the reign of King Gajabahu II (1131-

1153) and it was very clear that it was an internal power struggle for the throne of Ceylon and not a unitary regime for the whole country. Many South Indian soldiers and merchants engaged in administration and trade from the reign of Vijayabahu the Great (1055-1110) were still active in Sri Lanka at the time of writing this inscription. Furthermore, as the Viharahinna inscription itself points out, the ritual called chivalrous means to serve one's master. Accordingly, the merchant community, which had hitherto traded in the city and collected taxes, was traditionally the subjects of their chief. They belonged to the *Nanadesin* trade group (Pathmanathan 1998-1999) and the inscription further reveals how they traded in honor of the King of Sri Lanka and its administration. Thus, *Muvalan Muttan* alias *Nanādēsiyān dān*, who had adapted to the rule of the then King of Sri Lanka, was arrested and put in chains by *Vēṇādudaiyār*. However, with the economic prosperity of the Bay of Bengal after the eleventh century AD, the rulers of South India engaged in a power struggle between Sri Lanka, the Kingdom of SriVijaya and China to seize power. Hence, it is clear from the inscription that *Vēṇādudaiyār*, as a public servant associated with the Chola rule, launched a struggle in this area with the support of the King of Sri Lanka and took advantage of the trade activities which had hitherto prevailed.

There are examples of temples in South India being entrusted to an educated organization for administration and they were called *Perumakkal* (Balasubramanyam, 1971: 182). The Samuttirapatti inscription in the Madurai district dates back to 1050 AD, and further shows how the *Perumakkal* dynasty gave them the multiple honor of *Erivara-Pattinam*. (EI: Vol.43, 16) By the 10th century AD, the Uttaramerur inscriptions in India stated that the *Perumakkal* had the power to collect fines and could not carry out any independent action on other external administrative activities. The inscription further states that the collection of fines should be done through institutions called *sabha*. (ibid) The board also imposed a fine of 124 *kanam* on Perumal for failing to recover the fine. (EI, Vol.XXIV: 40) The role of *Perumakkal* was the same in Sri Lanka and they are mentioned in the Sri Lankan Buddha Inscription. This inscription refers to a concession granted by *Perumakkal*, the governing body of the town of Budumuththava (Pathmanathan, 2000). *Perumakkal* has taken timely steps to release them by forcing the security forces to find out that they are in a precarious position so far, where it is clear that the *perumakkal* traders are justified. They also set up garden committees and tank management committees for the administration of relevant areas in Sri Lanka, and these committees were organized as small

assemblies and general assemblies. The General Assembly of these local bodies, including India, was called *Perungudi* and its members were called *Perumakkal*. In the local administrative divisions of the Chola and Pallava, the name *Nagaram* was used to refer to merchants, and the name *Perumakkal* to refer to members of a meeting of government officials. During the Chola and Pallava rule, about twenty of these meetings (*Perumakkal*) were organized. Vidya Dehejia pointed out that the Villages and towns had efficient administrative control, and we read in the inscription of the year 929, during the 23rd year of Parantaka's reign, of the tank committee (*erivariya perumakkal*), garden committee (*tottavariya perumakkal*), priests (*bhatta perumakkal*), and eminent persons (*visishtha perumakkal*) who met in the great hall (*per ambalam*) to pass resolutions for the welfare for the village. (Vidya dehejia 2021:93) further these committees came forward to provide various allowances during the dry season, especially to the people who made various donations to the temples. Recognition of great leaders of the Shiva religion was another significant role played by government officials.

Thus it is clear that the *Perumakkal* mentioned in the Viharahinna inscription ruled the trading city with the patronage of the king of the country. Accordingly, they have observed the legal status of supplying lamp oil to the Buddhist temple where the inscription is located and the collection of taxes in the trading city. Accordingly, as stated in the inscription, the arrested trade community will henceforth relinquish the right to collect lamp oil and the traditional practice of levying taxes. In return, the desperately arrested community is requesting the authorities to provide them with four *kāsu* (*kāsu*) for a one-day meal and clothing.

The new entrepreneurs named the city *erivīran-ṭānam* and gained international fame. During this period, as in many other countries, the island's internal trade was conducted in the vicinity of rural small markets and trading towns. According to Subramaniam, *Erivira patṭānam* means "mercantile town" (Subramaniam: 1957, 15). The naming of the trading city affiliated with the Viharahinna monastery as *erivīran ṭānam* indicates its involvement in international trade. The words "*erivīran*" and "*ṭānam*" are mentioned in many *ainnuruvar* inscriptions in Sri Lanka and India. *Pattana* or *patṭānam* stands for a township or city in most of the Indian languages. (Indrapala, 1971:107) Pathmanathan pointed out that the *Eriviar* are the "spear-throwing warriors" (Pathmanathan, 1998-

1999: 119) who defended the city. It would appear from the tone and contents of the text of the inscription that at a particular stage of its development the *pattinam* was named after the military community of *Erivīrar* as *erivīraṅṅānam* on a decision made by the governing body of the *pattinam*, which was dominated by merchants. (ibid) Hall defines this as a warehouse located in a remote area between *Pattana* and cities (Hall 1980: 105). Champakalakshmi pointed out, this is a warehouse that is protected and reaped by travel traders. (Champakalakshmi, 1996) According to the Samuttirapatti inscription of Tamil Nadu, the *ainnuruvar* merchants, along with the brave merchant's *virakkodiyar*, bestowed on the city the name *erivira-pattinam*, where the *virakkodiyar* was honored with various gifts. They followed a similar policy with regard to Sri Lanka, compensating the local ruler for the release of the imprisoned Vira merchants, and renaming the town of Thanmasagara-Pattinam, where they lived, as *Erivirapaṅṅānam*. Accordingly, the military system called their service *erivīrar*, which was renamed "*erivīraṅṅānam*" by the addition of the *paṅṅānam* name, by the *annururar* and *viraValaṅṅeyar* merchants. According to its explanatory information, the word city (*pattinam*) is recorded in two ways. In one case it is defined as *erivira-pattinam* or "city of brave soldiers", while in another it is referred to as *pattinam pagudi* or "the place where merchants' decisions are recorded, and profits from trade are given to temples for ceremonies and maintenance". It is clear that the trading city mentioned in the Viharahinna inscription is located in the center of Sri Lanka and has been maintained as an interchange center for the protection of warriors by setting up warehouses.

## Conclusion

Considering the period in which the inscription was written, it is clear that the administration of the city has been carried out in accordance with the previous customs. Accordingly, with the assistance of the King, the government took over the power of the area with the help of the Tamil forces with the aim of maintaining good governance. Accordingly, this trading town is an international trade center protected by traders, or providing benefits, with military protection to protect warehouses, and donating a portion of the proceeds to the lighting of the Viharahinna Vihara. The administration was carried out with the support of the Sinhala Buddhist community.

Viharehinna, near Moragolla of Kandapalle Koralle in the Matale North Dt. Sri Lanka. On a stone slab within the ruined Buddha Vihara complex.

Avanam, 9, pp. 33-34. c. AD 1150.

1. *svasti śrī samasta bhuvanāśraya pañcasata virasāsa laksh*
2. *milarikrita varaprasāta . śrīvāsutēva kantali mūlabhatrōr*
3. *bhava śrī ashtātasa pattana dvātrinsat vēlāpura co*
4. *tushashti kaṭikaistāna diśayaśraya divyasarū samaya*
5. *darmma sampurnna sakalapura nivāsaniyākiya sri*
6. *aiyapolir pura paramēśvarikku makkalākiya veyya cutar neṭu*
7. *vēl vīraValañceyar patinet tu pattinamum muppattirantu velā puramu*
8. *m arupattu nāṅku kaṭikaittāvalamum tāvaḷattuccetti*
9. *yuñ cetti puttiraguri kavariyuri kātripapuri kāmuntasvá*
10. *miyum oṭtanum ulpacumpaik kāranum arikakāranu*
11. *m āvaṅakkāranu... vīrauum pāvatai virapum āriyatto-*
12. *tarun tamil valla ca... lanum palutilat tolil va -*
13. *Ila kalutai mēva... vaṅumullittu aram valarak kali*
14. *meliyap pukal perukat ticaiyanaittun ceviḷu paṭāmar cenkōlē*
15. *munnāka samaya dharmam initu natāttukinra patineṅpūmi nāpku*
16. *ticai nānātēcit ticai vilariku ticaiyāyirattarinurruvar kaṅṅiyamu-*
17. *ttar ullitta patineṅpūmi (vi) vīrarōm mācēpakāmamāṅa tanmacākarap paṭṭana-*
18. *ttup perumakkal erikalai nōkkic ceyta cirappāvatu nam utappiranta*
19. *mu... vaḷan muttanāpa nānātēci yāṅṅāpai vēṅṅātutaiyār pitittuc ci-*
20. *raiceyṭu onpātukait talai yiluppina pōṭu āṅārikācu kututtu vitu kon*
21. *tamaiyālum vellittāli ceyviyttup patineṅpūmi erivīran tāpame-*
22. *pru nāmancāttit kulattin pērittup perui cirappu ceytamaiyil nari*
23. *kaḷum namperumakkalukkuc cirappuc ceyya vēntumenru ni.lattuki .*
24. *vitum vilakkennaiyum paṅamunnu nāttuccettikaḷum nam utap-*
25. *pirantārum ippattinattil paṅamunṅātitākavum virun cīrumāṭṭuttāvum parrai*
26. *katti ērātitākavum ivarukku pakarcōru peruvatāvum pāvāṅai mēnatai*



27. *nālu kācu peruvatākavum ippaṭic ceyya vīramuraimai aliyac ceyta*  
28. *I paṇiyum ceṭiyum otukki muttum purakum atikkapperuvatākavum ip*  
29. *paṭi ceyyumaṭattu uttirattilalintu paṭuvānākil avan pinam nāyelavu*  
30. *māvatākavum ipparicu camaintu kallum palakaiyum nāṭtinom tiraḷan... 31.*  
*varkālatarkattiyulla nāttuccettiyum tiralan kampanāpa pillaccakalan nāpātēci itta*  
32. *munaivallapa nāṇātēcikkōpu nātāpa namvīttu muriyanum kūttaD kālanāṇa*  
33. *nūrāyiran tacamaṭi mummata vāraṇappillaiyum virakaḷ murper ārayan kūttanāna*  
*vīrakal*  
34. *ainnūrruva mantila ayirashṭānamum pirān cāttanāna vīraka! cēnāpatiyāntāpum*  
35. *kampan aruvanampala pi!*  
36. *laiyāntānum tiruvarankan ēranāṇa tēciyāparanappillaiyum u ti. tēca pa villanāpa*  
*cēnāpati vīrakāḷayum nāṭtarayan kannanāna*  
37. *tinenpūmi vīrarom aramaravarka.*

(Sabbarayalu and Shammugam 2002:249-251)

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