

MILITARY HISTORY OF VILLUPURAM DISTRICT ON ARCHAIC PERIOD: A STUDY THROUGH HERO STONES

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Abstract

Hero stones are important evidence of the bravery of the people during the archaic period. Indeed, there are many hero stones available in the region of Villupuram, proving the battles, warfare, and skirmishes in this region. Furthermore, it has provided enormous warfare about ancient kings who were directly or indirectly involved in the brave act. Villupuram is a significant megalithic site where prehistoric antiquities tell the history of the past. Villupuram is the prehistoric museum where all kinds of sources are held and reflected in the monuments. While human habitation was established, the protection process was also initiated. Protecting the family, society, kings, or region was the primary act of humans back then. Over the years, those who died in battle have been honored with hero stones and the most memorable monuments.

Keywords: *Hero stones, archaic period, Battle, warrior, warfare, Villupuram district*

Introduction

Villupuram is a significant megalithic site where prehistoric antiquities tell the history of the past. Villupuram is the prehistoric museum where all kinds of sources are held and reflected in the monuments. While human habitation was established, the protection process was also initiated. Protecting the family, society, kings, or region was the primary act of humans back then. Over the years, those who died in battle have been honored with hero stones and the most memorable monuments. While the kings, kingship, or kingdom evolved in this region, the battles between the kings emerged in this region. All the acts were exhibited in this region through literary, epigraphic, and monumental evidence. This chapter deals with the brave act between the Megaliths and the Pallavas. It also focused on hero stones, king battles, and analysing literary sources based on the available sources.

Area Profile

Villupuram district is the twenty third district of the Tamil Nadu State. It has been created after the bifurcation from the erstwhile composite South Arcot District. It was officially commenced from 30th September 1993 with the head quarters of Villupuram. Villupuram could be the fourth largest district in Tamil Nadu, which predominantly an agrarian district.¹ The major geographic advantages of these coastal regions are consisted upland plains, deltaic plains, flood plains and coastal plains. This part of the costal has extended width of six kilometers including strandlines, sand dunes, raised beaches, and mangrove swamps.² This chapter focused to reveal the physical and geographical profile in Villupuram district.

Historical background

Villupuram was ruled by the great kingdoms, namely the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Pallavas, the Marathas, the Gingee Nayaks, the Vijayanagara Kings, the Bijapur Sultans, the Nawabs, the British, and the Governors. The Cholas were the most powerful rulers in Villupuram. Among these rulers, Karikala Cholas was the supreme ruler. In a few years, the Cholas are deposed by the Pallavas and those who came under their control. The great path of the great Pallavas was also marked by Vijjalaya Cholas. The vacuum was given to the Eastern Chalukyas by the Chola dynasty. Jatavarman Sundara Pandya—I raise to prominence in the Chola dynasty. The supremacy of the Cholas came to an end after the Pandyas took over the seat. Then the Vijayanagara kings and their subordinates, the Nayaks, ruled for a while. The region was then dominated by Golconda Sultan, Mughals, and Europeans. This region was prominently featured in Tamil Nadu's history after independence.

Cult of Hero Stones in Tamil Nadu

During the reign of the king, the Hero Stone was erected to honour the bravery of a man, a woman, or even an animal.³ However; it was identified in all over Tamil Nadu, memorial of glorious past in different form. In Tamil Nadu, the erective memorial stones founded from the period of Megalithic culture. The gradual development of the megalithic culture, the hero cult had been reflected in the period of Sangam. The Tamil Literary works have been mentioned about the rituals of hero-stones. Hero stones are considered as the prominent evidence to study the military history of the people in Tamil Nadu. Indeed, the only source had given about the details on bravery, war-memories from archaic period.

Hero Stones also given the details about the life and livelihood of the people and also prevailed the dress code, hair style, ornaments, weapons, domestication, habits, beliefs, customs, folks and languages. Hero stones are major source to explain the bravery of warriors who have scarified their life for defending the enemies and lost their life for the country, kings, region and community.

Hero Stones in Villupuram District

The hero stone, generally referred to as *Nadukal* (erected stone), commemorates the memorable event. The first hero stone was discovered in Tamil Nadu during the Sangam period. The erecting of hero stones was prevalent in the Villupuram region from the Sangam period to the Vijayanagar period. Warriors, soldiers, and even kings who faced death while fighting for their motherland were honoured by erecting hero stones.⁴ These These stones have been worshipped by the people over the years.⁵ The local people called the hero stones "*Thorattikal*."

Model

Regularly, the hero stones have three panels, but sometimes they are available in four or five. Panels are based on the events of that period. The upper panel depicts the worshipping of a deity, the middle layer depicts the hero, and the bottom of the panel describes the battle scene. Often, the inscription displays the bas-relief of the panel. More importantly, the panel emphasizes the decoration figures and carved stones. The carved inscription of the panel, especially written on the back side of the panel, reveals the heroic action of the warriors, a battle scene, and the names of the kings who were involved in the actions. Hero stones were typically erected to honour the brave warrior, both an individual and a group of people who gave their lives in the service of a king, country, or society. In the mediaeval period, the hero stones were converted into folk deities.

Hero stone in Nerikunam village

A stone was erected in memory of a person who died in the battle of the village, which took place in Nerikunam Village, Vikravandi at Villupuram. A group of people from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) from Chennai formed a circle and identified a hero stone above it. The Hero Stone might belong to the period between the 4th and 5th centuries A.D. The paleographic analysis of the evidence, particularly epigraphical sources, indicated that it could be the period of the script's transformation from Brahmi to Vatteluttu script.⁶ According to this source, the brave act performed in this region dates back to the fourth century.

Sati Stone at Sendiyampakkam

This Sati stone was identified in Sendiyampakkam in Villupuram District. This stone dates from the sixth century A.D., possibly from the Pallava period. In the Sati stone, the hero is depicted at the center, holding the sword (Ganga style) in the right hand and a prominent shield in the left. He also has a dress beneath his hip and a kattar on the right side of his hip. His wives, who committed sati after the hero died, displayed both sides as well. The right side of the lady holds a toy pot, and the left side of the lady holds a flower. A lamp is also depicted on the left side of the lady's leg.

The first inscriptions shows the following description

1. *Ya Amur aa*
2. *Raisaru makkal*
3. *....rummakatti*
4. *Arukarupoosa*
5. *....gl;lh....patta*
6. *Rugal*

The second inscriptions shows the following description

1. *...Potha a*
2. *Raisaru makkal*

3. *trukuvvi*
4. *aarutharu puma*
5. *kanna....*

Hero Stones at Navakandam

The hero stone was housed in Jambai's Temple Jambunathaeswarar. The *navakanda nadukal* (hero stone) was erected in honour of a hero in order to complete a mandapa at the temple. His brother was given land as Uthirapatti. The hero is depicted cutting his head off and holding the sword in both hands. This could be a special feature of this Navakanda sculpture. In general, inscriptions would be inscribed directly on the hoof. But in this place; the inscription is recorded on the walls of the Sri Jambunatheswarar temple. The details of the sources said that this inscription belongs to the 13th regnal year of Koperunjingan, who had given the tax-free lands around 150 *kuli* to the thanathar, the younger brother of Atkondan. He could cut off his head so that the nirutha (dancing hall) mandaba in the temple of Tirutantonri aludaiya nayanar at Jambai could be completed. Atkondan is stated to be the younger brother of Perralvi, who is the temple maid servant residing in the village and becomes the voluntary sacrifice for the successful completion of a mandapa. This may not appear to be a war act, but rather a brave act.

Hero Stone at Mel Olakkur

On this hero stone, three warriors are holding a sword and shield. The hero stone was erected to honour the three warriors who lost their lives in the war. One warrior holds his sword up while the other two point their swords down. These hero stones are the major source to understand the military history of the people in Villupuram district.

Hero stone at Karadi

This hero stone held in Karadi, Thirukkivilur taluk in Villupuram district. This inscription belongs to the period 8-9th century A.D, which possessed two lines as "*Pulling Kotradai Nirai Neettu Pattan Iduru*". There is an image showed in the hero depicted with warrior who may be going to war.⁷

Hero stone in Palappattu

This stone inscription is held in the Palappattu in Villupuram district. A hero stone sculpture held in the side of lake. He looks straight to fight in the scene. He had bow and arrow in the hands, to ready for the fight. Also he had the bough to have the arrow in the shoulder. This hero stone might belong to the 16th century A.D.⁸

Hero Stone in Lake

A hero stone inscription held in the lake, near the having five lines of epigraphical sources. A warrior scene not depicted in this place is different from other places. This letters depicted that belongs to the earlier period before Irulappatti. Also it is given that transformed from Tamil Brahmi to Vattezhuthu.⁹

1. *Pirayagam Yerantha*
2. *k Kallap Porutpa*
3. *ttan Therukkalla*
4. *Ru Magan Nilakanta (Raisa)*
5. *n kal*

Neelakandan, son of Therukkallaru who have died in the battle in Pirayagam, Therukkallaru may be the father name.¹⁰

Hero stone in Athippakkam

Athippakkam is located near Tindivanam in Villupuram District. A stone sculpture in square slab scaled 107 cm. depicted the warrior A bow in held in the chest of the warrior who catcher the same on the right hand. Athippakkam having the three hero stones which literally known as *Navakanda Sirpam*.¹¹

Hero stone Pakkam –I

A Nadukal (Hero stone) is located in Sankarapuram taluk in Villupuram District. This hero stone having the epigraphical sources belongs to Simha Vishnu in the regnal year 574 A.D. A warrior killed in a 'Cattle war' named 'Katti' son of 'Sedamu'. A seven line inscription depicted the news about the war sequence in this region.

The lines are:

'Koliyasaiya Singa Vinna Parumarku Irubathu Nangavathu Ivvur Koruk Konda Nandru Sodarum Makkal Katti erindhy Pattankal'

Hero Stone in Pakkam – 2

A Hero stone held in Kali temple in Kallakurichi taluk in Villupuram district. There are two hero stones held in this region which depicted about the war sequence in the region.¹²

Hero stone in Kanangadu

A hero stone is located in Kanangadu village in Villupuram district. This hero stone having epigraphical sources belongs to Mahendravarma I regnal year(15th year). A warrior is grasping a shield and sword depicted the war sequence. Megondrai King have made the expedition to Melur Kings Adhan killed in this incident, which held during the region of Mahendra Varama I. As per the epigraphical data which dated during the 7th century A.D

The line are

'Kolisaiya perumarki pathi raindavadu mee kondrai natta arasarai yotti na pusal lil pattan melur adhan'

Sangam Age

Tamil Nadu has a great tradition of heritage and culture that has developed over two thousand years and still continues to flourish. This great cultural heritage of the State of Tamil Nadu evolved through the rule of dynasties that rebuild the state during various phases of history. Many of the ruling dynasties gave patronage to Art and culture that resulted into the development and evolution of a unique Dravidian culture which Tamil Nadu today symbolized. The Sangam Age in Tamil country is significant and unique for its social economic, religious and cultural life of the Tamil Ns. There was an all round development during this period. The term 'Sangam' literally means 'confluence'. However, in the context of early South Indian history this term can be rendered into English as an assembly, a college or an academy of learned people, held under the patronage of the Pandyan kings, who were great lovers of literature and the fine arts. The Sangam was a voluntary organization of poets. This academy or assembly of learned people including the Sangam poets produced literally works of high quality.

Conclusion

Hero stones are important evidence of the bravery of the people during the archaic period. Indeed, there are many hero stones available in the region of Villupuram, proving the battles, warfare, and skirmishes in this region. Furthermore, it has provided enormous warfare about ancient kings who were directly or indirectly involved in the brave act. Villupruam is celebrated not only for its culture, tradition, heritage, inhabitation, agriculture, economic status, social status, and politics. But also significant military sites where people fought solemnly or between kings or kingdoms.

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