CHAPTER III
TIRUKKÖYILÜR DURING THE ŚAṆΓAM AGE

Tirukkōyilūr - Its beginnings

Eventhough the palaeolithic tools are reported to have been found at Kalūvan hills 38 kilometers west of Tirukkōyilūr, no such implements were discovered, so far, in or around Tirukkōyilūr. However we have evidence to suggest that the human occupation of this town may have commenced in the Iron age. The early historic period in Tamil Nādu represented by the Śaṅgam classics coincided in point of time with the later phase of the Iron age culture with its characteristic megalithic practices.

In South India the erection of megaliths was a dominant trait among some sections of the population during the Iron age. Megaliths are essentially "post-ex-carnation burials" and would apply to the structures of a rudimentary character made of huge stones.

A sporadic survey conducted around Tirukkōyilūr in the last century by J.H. Garstin revealed the existence of megaliths near Tirukkōyilūr.
At Devanur⁶, a village 1½ miles from Tirukkoilur, a dolmen and two sarcophagus were found. The sarcophagus contained human bones and the iron pieces. The bigger of the two, was 4½ feet long. The cists had portholes on the east and human bones and 8' X 6' X 7½' was the average size. Circles of granite slabs planted vertically into the earth surround the dolmens which are found spread over three to four acres of land. A monolithic, locally known as Kacherikal, was in the centre. It was 14' high 3' wide and 6" thick.

Kollur⁷, 4 miles from Tirukkoilur, is another village where dolmens are found. It is on the left bank of the river Pennur. The cist measured 6' 4" X 3' 6" X 4' 3" high with a capstone of 10' 6" X 8' 9" X 1' thick and a port-hole. The floor was paved with stone. Another partly buried cist measured 1' 6" in diameter. The port-hole contained 18 pots of different sizes inside the chamber. The pots are highly polished black-and-red ware with a fine fabric. A sarcophagus 4' long, 1' 3" wide and 9" deep with 15 legs and rounded ends was also found.

It is said⁸ that similar megalithics are found at Iralabanda Bapanattam in the Palamger Taluk of
The excavations conducted at the megalithic sites in Tamil Nadu are quite a few and some evidence are available for the date of these megaliths. Generally, the megalithic culture in Tamil Nadu is assigned to 300 B.C. to 100 A.D. Sites like Paivasampalli, attest to this date as they yield typical megalithic wares and deposits in the stratum. The contents of these monuments reveal a highly advanced material culture, domestication of horse and the great reverence the people had for the dead. They indicate a number of generations of a vast and settled agricultural people. In view of the facts stated above it may be said that the megaliths around Tirukkovilur indicate that this region was under the occupation of civilised agricultural people at least by 300 B.C. if not earlier.

Tirukkovilur Under Tirumalik-kari

The later phase of Iron age in South India witnessed the emergence of organised kingdoms in different parts of the region. Three crowned kings namely, the Chola, the Pandya and the Chera ruled different parts of the Tamil country. The edicts of Asoka Maurya refer
to these kingdoms. The history of these three kingdoms could not be written in a continuous manner owing to the lack of evidence. The primary source material for writing the history of the period is drawn mainly from the Sangam literature. The literary works of this group provide us with only "unrelated names which render a regular history of the period impossible. We must therefore rest content with the outstanding figures and their achievements reported by the poets."

During the Sangam age Kovalur, identified with modern Tirukkovilur, situated in the Malagu territory, was ruled over by a chieftain called Malaimudilkarai. He was one of the seven liberal patrons (Vallal) of the poets of the age. It seems that Kari ruled the territory independently. Nowhere it is said that Kari was subordinate of any king. A Puramuru poem states that three crowned kings of Tamil Nadu used to seek his alliance and support during wars. They sent large gifts to him to enlist his support. Very often the outcome of the war depended on his support to one or the other. It may be inferred that he supported the Cholas in the beginning and later on transferred his allegiance to the Cheras. It is difficult to list chronologically the sequence of
wars which lie is said to have fought.

Once Chola Rājasūyam-vēṭṭa-perumān-kili and Chēra Mantarēn Chēraṇ ḍrāmpōrāi were at war and Kari lent his support to the Chōla king. In the fight the Chēra was defeated and the poet states that the Chōla won the battle because of Kari's support to the Chōlas.

In another instance Kari sided with the Chēra king. He killed Valvil Ōri, the ruler of the Kelli-hills and enabled the Chēra to annex Ori's territory.

This valourous chief of Kevalur is said to have repulsed an Āryan army (āṇiyak) when it attacked Mūllur. It is however difficult to identify the Āryan army or the chief who led it.

Kari is referred to as the king of Mūllur in the Ihaaṭhānuṟ. From the Puranānūṟu we understand the Mūllur was a mountain and the Kurun tokai refers to the forest region of Mūllur. The hill is referred to in the Nemminai also. Konaṅgaĩ on the banks of the Pennai was also in his possession.

It is difficult to locate Mūllur at present. There is a village with that name in the Gingee taluk of
the South Arcot district. An inscription assignable to Utthama Chōla refers to Mullur or Tirumullur, a brahmadeva also named as Simhavishnu-chaturvedinmaigam in Kō-nādu on the northern bank (Vadakorai). A queen of a Chōla Parakāśarivarman was known as Mullur-nahgiyar. It is rather difficult to say whether the Saigam works refer to the same Mullur or a different one.

Nevertheless, this chief had a very ignominious end. Puramāru says that Mīdakān Nedamān Afji, the ruler of Tagaṇṭur attacked Kōvalur, Kāri's principal town and consequently the latter was dislodged from the place. The reason for the attack of Mīdakān is not clear? Perhaps Mīdakān attacked Kōvalur at the instance of the Chōla king who may be considered as a friend of Mīdakān, for the children of Kāri were captured by the Chōla king Kīllivalavan after Kāri's demise and were saved from death when the poet Kōvur Kilēr, interceded on behalf of them.

Kāri is often praised for his munificence. Poet Kapilār says that he had nothing else to call his own except the shoulders of his chaste wife. The poet sarcastically says that he is not discriminative in his gifts and is generous to one and all. His gifts
of chariots exceeded the rain drops on the Mullur summit.

Kāri was contemporary of Vādama Vemakkam Perum Sättenār, Kapilar, Nappasalaiyār, Perum Sittiraman, and Nallur Nettēttēnār. Kāri is assigned to the early part of the second century A.D. by E. Sivaraya Pillai and the late second century A.D. or early third century A.D. by N. Subrahmaniam. 

It is said that Kapilar, after the death of his patron Pāri of Parambu, took charge of the two daughters of the deceased and went to Vichikko and Irukkōvel, two of the chieftains of Tamil country and requested them to marry the girls. When they declined, Kapilar is said to have left them in the custody of brahmanas at Kovallur and starved himself to death. According to an eleventh century Chola epigraph he is said to have died at Tirukkōyilūr by entering into fire after giving in marriage Pāri's daughter to Mala'yan. In the present state of our knowledge it is difficult to say which story is true.

We do not know what happened to the two sons of Kāri, who were saved from death by Kovūr Kilār. Nappasalaiyār who had sung a song on Kāri, also sang in praise of one Tirukkētiam. The exact relationship between Kāri and Tirukkētiam is not known. His full name
as recorded in the above poem is Malaiyan Choliya Enadi Tirukkanan. The title Choliya Enadi in the later name indicates that he was a commander of the Chola army. Probably after the defeat of Tirumukkari, Tirukkanan became a Chola subordinate and was subsequently appointed commander by the Cholas. We hear nothing about Tirukkanan's successors afterwards. Until we come to the Pallava period reference to Tirukkoilur is simply not available.
FOOTNOTES


2. Dolmens and stone circles which may be assigned to the early centuries of the christian era are reported to have been found around Tirukkōvilūr (Robert Sewell, Lists of Antiquarian Remains of Presidency of Madras, vol.1, Archaeological Survey of Southern India, Madras, 1882. p.210).

3. For a detailed discussion on Megaliths of South India, see B.K. Gururaja Rao., Megalithic Culture in South India (University of Mysore, Mysore, 1972) and the following Ancient India volumes: no.2 (1946) no.4 (1947-48), no.5 (1949) no.6 (1952), no.9 (1953) no.15 (1959). See also K.S. Ramachandran., A Bibliography on Indian Megaliths (Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, Madras, 1971).

5. J.H. Garstin who was the Collector of South Arcot district then, opened a number of dolmens and stone circles near Tirukkoilur and furnished a paper to the *Indian Antiquary*, vol.V (1876) p.159. This was followed by another paper, "Remarks etc.; Extinct races" by M.J. Wallhouse in the same volume (pp. 255-256).

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.


12. Ibid.


16. *ibid.*, pp.116-117


18. *Athenamula*, v.35.

19. Mën according to N. Subrahmanian means descendant. If it is so, Maleiyamun may mean a descendant of Maleiyar. (N. Subrahmanian, "The Maleiyar", *Journal of Indian History*, vol. XXXI, part I, 1966, p.205)

20. N. Subrahmanian states that "the expression Mudi it seems, is a variant of 'Kudum!' as in Nudukudumippara-vanudi meaning 'Chieftain'; it is not impossible that Tirumudi in Kari's name is no more than what 'Mudittalai' in Köpperuman Killis name indicate, i.e. 'one wearing a
beautiful tuft of hair". (M. Subrahmaniam, op. cit., p. 206). It would be more appropriate if Mudi in Tirumudi is explained as a crown. This view is also suggested by V. Kesakasebhai (op. cit., p. 104). The prefix Tiru is evidently a honorific word.


The word Kari literally means black colour. A river passing through North Arcot district is called Kari-äru. Kari’s horse was also called by the same name (See Sirumangalumpadai, v. 110 and Puranamur, v. 158). Kari, the last part of the name seems to be the personal name of the chieftain.

22. The other six patrons were Päri, the ruler of Parambu-mäçu of 300 villages and a hillock, Õri, ruler of Kelli hills, Adhamen Nedumñi Añji, ruler of Tehadür, Pëhan, ruler of Nallür of the hilly country, Åy, ruler of Õykaţi or Podiyil hills, Nelli, ruler of Nelli in the Panyon land 'M. Subrahmaniam., Sahgam Polity, (Asia publishing house, Bombay, 1966, p. 56).
23. *Puranānūru*, vv. 122, III.5-6, (Nivarūlorovan rūnāgī- yarana āttīner tarīnum koḷē manādi)


25. *Ahanānūru*, vv. 208, 209; also *Puranānūru*, vv.150, 122; *Sirunānurampaṭi*, vv.84, 113.

26. *ibid.*

27. *Niyer tuvanrīva pēriśai Mallūrp Palorudēn Kēlimda Vōlvn Malaiyan toruver kodī yālīgu* (*Harrinaśi*, v.170)


32. *Ahanānūru*, v.35.


34. *STI*, XIII, no.352.

35. *ibid.*, XX, nos. 74, 77, 285 and 293.
36. Saruvēt Timil kurān murasi
nezumurōgu murāntik Chongemara Kadendo ninēru
yōrriya nnun Pēgumāntik Kariyai yinrum Penān
Pēdīnān markon marru ni murenēriku Kōvalur mūnīn
arena tikiyi yendiya tōle (Purānēnūrū, v.99)

37. Purānēnūrū, v.46.

38. ibid., v.122.

39. ibid., v.125.

40. ibid., vv.121-124.

41. ibid., v.126.

42. ibid., v.156.

43. Sirunāārampadii, vv.91-95.

44. The Chronology of the Early Tamils (Madras, 1932)
Table at the end.


47. ibid., v.201.

48. STI., VII, no.363.