

CHAPTER - VII

CONCLUSION

From the discussion of “History of Agasteeswaram Taluk as gleaned from inscriptions” Agastheeswaram, a tradition bound area has played a predominant role in the political, religious, cultural, economical and social area of the erstwhile Nanchil Nadu or South Travancore. The present Agastheeswaram, Thovalai, Kalkulam and Vilavancode Taluks of Kanniyakumari District were formerly familiarly known as Nanchil Nadu. Among the four, Agastheeswaram and Thovalai were clearly demarcated as Nanchil Nadu. Nanchil denotes plough. Activities associated with agriculture have been common in Agastheeswaram and Thovalai and hence these two taluks are specifically grouped together. The area without any interruption of either hilly area or forest area is Agastheeswaram. The inscriptions which are engraved on the temples brought more importance to the temples as well as the life of ancient kings.

The inscriptions found in the district belong to different periods of different dynasties. The Travancore Government was the pioneer in publishing the inscriptions of this region through ‘Travancore Archaeological Series’. Afterwards the state

department of Archaeology Government of Tamilnadu took initiative of copying the inscriptions in the district in Agasteeswaram and published 'Kanniyakumari Kalvettukal' in five languages.

Agasteeswaram taluk has great historical heritage. Agasteeswaram taluk was ruled by Cholas, Pandyas, Venad and Travancore kings from 11 to 19 BC. The people of Agasteeswaram Taluk belong to different religion. The fertility of the soil attracted the attention of the Eastern Kings. On so many occasions Pandyas, Cholas, Muslims, Nayaks and even the Vijayanagar kings attacked Nanchil Nadu to take away the riches and paddy from Agasteeswaram.

During the twelfth century Kulothunga I introduced a new system of introducing military cantonments at various strategic places with a view of maintaining law and order and preventing attempts by the outlying regions breaking away from the empire. One such unit was kept at Kottar which is an integral part of Agasteeswaram. An inscription at Cholapuram dated in his 9th regnal year mentions about Kottar Nilappadai.

There are certain places of historical importance in Agasteeswaram. One place is known as Vallankumaran vilai. One of the Chola commanders known as Vallan Kumar came to Agasteeswaram and stationed his army in a nearby place. Even today this area is known as Vallankumaran vilai. Another commander one Muhilan came to Agasteeswaram and a place very near to Agasteeswaram is eventually known as Muhilan Kudieruppu. Thus, Agasteeswaram is a place of historical importance which has drawn the attention of many invaders.

The plain lands in Agasteeswaram provide enormous arable lands causing sufficient supply of paddy not only to Nanchil Nadu but also the whole of Venad. As

the maximum yield of paddy, is associated with the credit of calling Nanchil Nadu as the granary of Venad. Nanchil Nadu had been gloriously known then as the “granary of Travancore”. Majority of the population of the taluk depend upon agriculture as their main occupation. People of Agastheeswaram cultivate paddy, coconut and plantain that boosts the economy of Agastheeswaram Taluk. There are a number of salt pans in Agastheeswaram Taluk. The presence of plenty of coconut husks makes production of coir and other coir products. The landless too earn their livelihood by transplantation of paddy and weeding works. In the dry areas, cereals like blackgrams, green-grams, millets and different kinds of roots are cultivated.

As the eastern part of Agastheeswaram taluk is rich in water resources, coconut gardens are found both on the coastal areas and on the plains from Chothavilai beach to Rajakkamangalam beach and in the interior areas. This enhances coir production and it has become a cottage industry.

Agastheeswaram taluk has no bigger mountains. There are small hills dotted here and there. One such hillock is the Maruthuval Malai noted for rare medicines and herbs. Medicines in Tamil are termed as “Marunthu” and “Malai” means mountain. Hence this hillock having rare medicines is called Maruthuvalmalaianary of Travancore”. Hinduism is the religion of the majority people. Temples are the main stay and back-bone of Hindu religion Agastheeswaram is a land of temples. Both Vaishnava and Siva temples are found in large numbers in Agastheeswaram. The most important Vaishnavite temples in Agastheeswaram are Parvathipuram temple, Suchindram temple, Kariamanickapuram temple, Parakkai temple, Krishnancoil temple and Thiruppathisaram temple. The prominent temples associated with Saivism are Suchindram temple, Puravaseri Siva temple,

Vadiveeswaram temple, Thazhakudy temple and Boothapandeeswaramudayar temple in Boothapandy. Like Saivism and Vaishnavism, Jainism also flourished in Agastheeswaram Taluk. Nagercoil, the capital of the District became a religious centre for Jainism. The temple is now popularly known as Nagaraja temple. In South Travancore Durga is worshipped under the name Bhagavathi. Kanniyakumari, one of the most sacred centres of pilgrimage got its name from the Virgin Goddess Bhagavathy to whom the ancient and reputed temple in the place is dedicated. In 1810, Churches were erected at Tamaraikulam, Puthalam, Eathamozhy, James Town, Athikaadu and Kovilvilai. Agastheeswaram progressed as a centre of education also. In those times classes were conducted in temples and verandas. In 1809, Ringletaube the London Mission Missionary came to South Travancore and he selected Agastheeswaram as the best centre for education.

Though the caste Hindus neglected the low caste people, the low caste people endured the hardships. The poor low caste people were treated as slaves. Education was denied to the low caste people. They were not permitted to enter into the temples. They were forced to do work in the houses of the high caste people without any remuneration. The poor people were permitted to wear a piece of cloth between the waist and knee. Women were not permitted to wear upper garments. Continuous agitations and oppositions waged by the low caste resulted in the abolition of dress restrictions. The Act of 1859 forbade all restrictions on dress and men and women were permitted to wear dress just like the high castes. But continuous steps were taken by the low caste people to liberate themselves from the yoke of the Caste Hindus. Uttram Thirunal Marthanda Varma issued a proclamation in 1853 for the abolition of slavery in Travancore. Slavery was abolished in June 24, 1855 and the

people of Agastheeswaram were entitled to enjoy free life. The Proclamation of 1936 known as the “Temple Entry Proclamation” issued by the king Chithira Thirunal, untouchables were permitted to enter into temples in Agastheeswaram and Nanchil Nadu.

Among the people of Agastheeswaram taluk, the Nadars form the majority community. The Brahmins, the Vellalas, the Nayars, the Chalias, the Chettis, the Mukkuvas and the Dalits are the other communities. They profess Saivism, Vaishnavism and other forms of Hindu worship. Yet Christianity is the dominant religion. But after 1956, there were religious conflicts between the Hindus and the Christians that causes communal and religious tension among the people.

The role of the Missionaries in the abolition of slavery was unique. It was they who first raised their voice of protest. “It was their drive and initiative which shook the conscience of all. It was their enthusiasm and zeal which was later championed by the general Cullen, the British Resident. But they did not depend on Government action alone; they acted as vanguard of the reform movement by striking at the root of the evil through a pragmatic approach of the education of the slave children. The political climate of the time and the positive interest shown by the British Resident favoured them and injustice should be brought to a close through their instrumentality. A people who had been in the grip of poverty, ignorance, apathy, and oppression were beginning to respond to the liberating efforts of the missionaries. The lives of many men and women missionaries who toiled restlessly and relentlessly had been cut short by the tropical climate and lack of essential facilities. But they had their own reward, the happiness of knowing that a people

who were a 'no-people' were becoming a 'new-people' responding to their efforts towards liberation.

In Agasteeswaram, there are many serious issues related to society. All the Brahmins enjoy high priority in the society. Low caste people were subjected to discrimination. Superstitious belief is praised by the people of the society. There is also illiteracy in that society. There are many social issues in that society. Child marriage and untouchability are also in that society. After the arrival of missionaries, there comes a scope for low caste people. Untouchability, Sati and Child marriage are prohibited after the arrival of missionaries. It paved way to provide education to all. Hospitals were built and thereby awareness is created. All the problems related to caste are eradicated. Widow Remarriage was given higher priority. Property rights are given to women. After the arrival of missionaries, there are lot of changes in people, culture and the society.

Architecturally we find several types of temples in Agasteeswaram taluk. The Nagaraja temple of Chera style, the Cholaraja temple of Chola style and the Suchindrum temple of Pandya style clearly show the import of Chera, Chola and Pandya style of architecture in this taluk. The temples of Agasteeswaram taluk reflect the rich Indian heritage and religious legacy. The inscriptions which engraved on the ancient temple walls, rocks, pillars, make the temple of this land worldwide popular and induce the foreigners to visit the Holy Temples of India. Kanniyakumari has been a great centre for art and religion for centuries. The architectural beauty of the temples in the area is the works of these rulers.

Thus Agastheeswaram named after the Tamil poet Agastyar extols in every aspect of human life and stands as the forerunner in the progress of the entire people of the erstwhile Nanchil Nadu or the present Kanniyakumari District.

A whole the present research talks in detail about the inscriptions of temple found in Agasteeswaram Taluk. Though we are not able to study the minute details of political history, a vast amount of valuable information have been studied through this research. Some of the inscriptions of the temples have details regarding the Economic, Cultural and Social activities prevailed in Agasteeswaram Taluk. Comparitively religions played a major role in Agasteeswaram Taluk. Which has reference in the inscriptions which are sculptured in the temples Hinduism had some prominent role missionaries, not only spread the religion but their presence had eradicated some of the superstitious belief that prevailed in the society. In short, this research will pave the way for knowing the history of Agasteeswaram Taluk.

With the help of this research certain other studies can be undertaken, especially political and religious happenings in micro way of research.