
DIFFERENT THEORIES ABOUT THE GENESIS OF THE PALLAVA DYNASTY

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Abstract: The origin of the dynasty of the Pallavas and that of their name has been a subject of controversy for a long time, and the attempts made to throw light on it have not made the mystery less impenetrable. That the Pallavas became a great power in South India in the sixth and seventh centuries, and that they contributed a great deal to the growth first of Buddhism and then of Hinduism, and to South Indian architecture and sculpture, are well known. But we have to find out who they were and when they came.

Dr. Vincent A. Smith in the first edition of his *Early History of India*, said that the origin of the Pallava clan or tribe, which supplied royal families to Kanchi, Vengi and Palakkada, was obscure, and that the name appeared to be another form of Pahlava. This was the name of a foreign clan or tribe frequently mentioned in inscriptions and Sanskrit literature, and Dr. Smith thought that it was derived ultimately from the name for the 'Parthians.' His supporters believed that this nomadic tribe of Parthians, Pahlavas, or Pallavas passed through India from the north to the south without leaving a trace of their long journey, just as if they had marched along a highway, and finally halted at Kanchipuram, defeated the uncivilized tribes living there, built a great city and ruled over them. The improbability of this story, notwithstanding the attempt on the part of some to determine the date of the supposed Parthian invasion and the Pallava immigration to the south, appears to have been clearly proved by Dr. Fleet. In a note to the *Indian Antiquary*, Mr. J. Burgess said that the Pallava theory of Dr. Vincent Smith could not be accepted and that Dr. Fleet had disposed of it by pointing out that it was based partly on a mistranslation. The Pallava mystery then became so much more mysterious that Dr. Vincent Smith in the second edition of the same work, published in 1908, changed his opinion and said that, though Dr. Fleet and other writers were disposed to favour the view that Pallavas and Pahlavas were identical, and that the Pallava dynasty of Kanchi should be considered of Persian origin, yet recent research did not support this hypothesis, and that it seemed more likely that the Pallavas were a tribe, clan or caste, which was formed in the northern part of the Madras Presidency, possibly in the Vengi country. He also added, perhaps to throw a doubt on his own

suggestion and to seek for the Pallava origin still further south, that the Vellalas, Kallas and Pallis of South India claimed to be connected with them. For eleven more years no satisfactory explanations were offered, and in *The Oxford History of India* published in 1919, Dr. Smith was constrained to admit that the Pallavas constituted one of the mysteries of Indian history, and that there was every reason to believe that future historians would be able to give a fairly complete narrative of the doings of the Pallava kings and lay open the secret of their origin and their connections.

Keyword: Pallava kings, Pallava dynasty, Tamil literature, Smith opinion,

Introduction: Mr. G. Jouveau-Dubreuil, Professor of the Pondicherry College, whose knowledge of Indian antiquities and allied subjects is profound, and who has done most to work out a rational history of the Pallavas from the earliest times to the decline of their power, from the available data of inscriptions and copper plates, accepted the challenge thrown out by Dr. Smith. In his book on *The Ancient History of Deccan*, published in 1920, he proceeds to give a plausible account of the origin of this elusive tribe. He takes the family tradition, given in the Velurpalayam plates, that the first member of the family who became king acquired all the emblems of Royalty on marrying the daughter of the Lord of Serpents—evidently a Naga princess, as his basis, and tries to prove a Pahlava-Naga alliance that enable the Pallavas to inherit the Kanchi throne. With painstaking care he first brings together the Satavahanas, the Chutu Nagas, the Western Kshatrapas, the Maharathis, etc., under a chronological arrangement before turning to the

matter of the Pallava-Naga alliance. But although this throws a flood of light on the obscure history of the Deccan during that early period, it does not in any way satisfy the reader. It leaves him to surmise that a Pahlava minister of the Western Kshatrapas reigning at Aparanta married the daughter of Siva-Skanda-Naga-Satakarni and inherited the throne of Kanchi. If the Pahlava minister or his son had made such an alliance and had, by some process not clearly explained, inherited the throne of Kanchi, the statement in the Velurpalayam plates would be verified. And as the Pahlavas were of Parthian origin, the older theory too would have been established. Thus the pious hope of Dr. Vincent Smith that the home of the Pallavas might be found somewhere further south still remains unfulfilled. The Naga dynasty, of course, was easily found by M. Dubreuil in the contemporaneous Chutu Nagas, who were fortunately succeeded by the Pallavas; but he has still to show that one of their kings was the ruler of a larger tract of land than was under the authority of

the Chutus. If an alliance of the Chutu Nagas with the Satavahanas could be established, a Satavahana king would answer the purpose. Such a king in the person of Siva-Skanda-Naga-Satakarni, who belonged to a dynasty of Andhra-cum-Chutu-cum-Maharathi, and in whose veins ran Naga blood for two generations, was ready to hand. As certain coins with the legend Sri Pulumayi were found near Cuddalore, Skanda Naga is assumed to have been identical with Sri Pulumayi and to have occupied the country of which Kanchi later became the capital. It is left to be inferred that this country was given as a dowry to his daughter, who married the Pahlava minister of the Western Kshatrapas or his son. Even supposing in the absence of any authorities, that the marriage did really take place, questions still arise whether the sovereignty of Siva-Skanda-Naga-Satakarni in the third century A.D., ever extended so far as to include Tondaimandalam, and whether there was no king of any other dynasty reigning at Kanchi at the time. There is no other authority than the finding of the coins; and that of course, without other evidence to support it does not prove anything, just as the finding of Greek and Roman coins in a place can never by itself prove that the place was under the sway of the Greeks or the Romans.

All this unsatisfactory groping in the dark was due to the ignorance of ancient Tamil literature under which Western scholars generally laboured, and partly also perhaps to their belief that no valuable historical information could be gathered from these works. But during the last decade or two there has been an awakening that has placed all the hidden treasures of ancient Tamil literature before the public. Among these is the Manimekalai, a veritable mine of information to the antiquarian and the historian. From the Manimekalai one is able to gather that one Killi, who was also known as Vadiverkilli, Venverkilli, Mavenerkilli, Nodumudikilli and Killi Valavan, the son and successor of Karikala the Great, was the Chola king reigning at Puhar or Kaveripumpattinam, when that city was engulfed by the sea, and that he thereupon removed his capital to Uraiyur. According to the Chilappatikāram, or the Epic of the Anklet, a sister work to the Manimekalai, the Chera king Senguttuvan built a temple for the worship of Pattini, and at the consecration of the temple there were present Gajabahu of Lanka, Ilam Cheliyan of Madura and Killi of Uraiyur, who also built temples for the same deity in their own countries. Gajabahu ruled in Ceylon from 113 to 135 A.D. The destruction of Puhar was therefore a little before this. It is also said in the Manimekalai that while Killi was reigning at Uraiyur, his brother Ilamkilli or Ilamko was at Kanchi, and after him Killi's son by a Naga princess, Tondaiman Ilantirayan, was installed at Kanchi. All these facts, taken from the Tamil Epics, were given by Prof.

Krishnaswami Aiyangar in a very valuable and instructive paper, published in the Indian Antiquary. But if he had dived deeper, he would have found more information throwing a great deal of light on the origin of the Pallavas. Tondaiman Ilantirayan was the son of Killi by Pilivalai, the daughter of Valaivanan, the Naga king of Mani-pallavam. He was lost in a shipwreck on his way from Mani-pallavam to Puhar, but was afterwards found washed ashore coiled up in a tondai creeper, and he was therefore called Tondaiman Ilantirayan, Tondaiman, and also Tirayan, because he was washed ashore by the sea. The sovereignty of Tondaimandalam, separated from Cholandalam, was assigned to him by his father, and he was the first king of Tondaimandalam, which was so called after his name, with his capital at Kanchi. Killi is also alleged to have caused to be made at Kanchi in imitation of those in the island of Mani-pallavam. This tank was perhaps the one referred to in the Kasakudi plates as the tank of Tirayan. Ilantirayan was the first independent king who reigned at Kanchi, and the dynasty started by him was called the pallava dynasty. He must have come to the throne about the third quarter of the second century A.D. The destruction of Puhar and the consequent removal of the capital to Uraiyur before 150 A.D., is confirmed by Ptolemy, the Alexandrian geographer, who wrote his work about that time, as he calls Orthoura (Urantai or Uraiyur) the Capital of the Cholas. As, perhaps, Ilantirayan's Naga mother was not considered equal in rank to his father, his dynasty was not called by the usual patronymic, but was designated by his mother's native place Mani-pallavam. Mani-pallavam has been identified as the Jaffna peninsula, which was then an island; and to observers sailing up from India the island would have appeared just like a sprout or growth on the mainland of Lanka, and hence it was called 'pallavam,' which in Tamil means 'a sprout' or 'the end of a bough.' The name Mani-pallavam occurs only in the Manimekalai. The more ancient name of the island was Manipuram; and the Sinhalese called it Mani-Nagadipa, as it was populated by the Nagas and governed by Naga kings. The prefix Mani appears to have been retained and the name pallavam added by the Tamils, as it appeared like a sprout springing from a mother tree. The later Pallavas called themselves by the birudas Buddhankura, Nayankura, Tarumankura and Lalitankura, with the Sanskrit ending ankura meaning 'a sprout.' The title Potharayar, adopted by the Pallava kings, is also derived from the Tamil word pottu, meaning 'a sprout' and synonymous with pallavam. These facts clearly show that they retained the memory of their origin and adopted titles bearing the same meaning as the Tamil word pallavam.

In the Rayakotta plates, a Pallava king Skanda Sishya, supposed to have lived earlier than Vishnugopa (330 A.D.), claims descent from Asvaddhama, the Brahman warrior of the Mahabharata, through a Naga princess. The origin of Ilantirayan was either forgotten by this time, or with the purpose of concealing the liaison of the Chola king with the Naga princess, this Puranic story was manufactured under Brahmanic influence and began to be believed. The legend of Ilantirayan as the originator of the Pallava dynasty was, however, referred to by Dr. Hultzsch in his notes on the Rayakotta plates.

The study of the Pallavas is a never ending academic flow of the historians. The Tamil Classics Manimekalai and Shilappadhikaram have a plenty of inputs about the Pallava kings. The Sri Lankan classics Mahavamsa and Kulavamsa too have a lot of inputs about the Pallavas.

I would like list a few important writings about the Pallavas here.

The Rev. F. Kittel wrote in the Indian Antiquary Volume VIII. FEBRUARY, 1879, Pages 47-51 about the Pallavas as a reply to some remarks on Dr. Pope's "Notes on the South-Indian or Dravidian Family of Languages", which was published in the Indian Antiquary Vol. V. Pp. 157. In the note he mentions about the origin of the Pallavas.

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