



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF KONGU REGION SAIVAITE TEMPLES IN TAMIL NADU

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Regional history has an importance of its own, particularly in a vast country like- Iriai-a. With Its numerous-customs-and-traditions. A proper study of the regional history with its historical background is necessary to understand the unique features of that particular region. Though time has imparted a lot of changes, the seven temples built in the Kongu region have retained the essential culture of yore. From the early period, Tamil Nadu or Tamil land was divided into five main territorial divisions and these were named Chera Nadu, Chola Nadu, Pandya Nadu, Tondai Nadu and Kongu Nadul. Tolkappiyam mentions the three divisions of the Kongu Nadu as Cheetham, Panri, and Malanadu², while Purananuru refers to Kongu Nadu as a separate division³. These sources confirm that the Kongu Nadu had flourished as a separate entity for several centuries. The early Sangam works refer to Kongu as an independent territorial division. It was surrounded by the Western Ghats and the hilly regions south of Mysore and included the present day districts of Coimbatore, Erode and Salem (excluding Attur taluk), Karur, Kulittalai taluk of Trichy district and Palani taluk of Dindugal district⁴. The region served as a gate way for the flow of the Kaveri river water into the Chola country towards the direction of Uraiyurkurram⁵. The name Kongu in general refers to the land and this term signifies in common parlance to honey, flower, dust, pollen etc. The people of the land came to be called Kongar⁶.

The Kongu region became the bone of contention between the kings of the Gangas of the North, the Cholas of the East, the Pandyas of the South and Cheras of the West'. Thus Kongu Nadu was an elevated plateau amidst natural frontiers, sheltered by a series of mountain ranges of considerable height and watered by a few famous rivers and streams. This predominant physical feature makes it possible to label it as a Golden Country⁸. Kongu region covers an area of 15,630 km² bounded by the rivers the Bhavani, Amaravati and Kaveri. This high region lies between 76° 39' and 77° 56' East Longitude and 10° 12' and 11° North Latitude. The physical features show its central location in the Southern Peninsular area⁹. According to K.S. Vaidyanathan, Kongu Nadu originally comprised of the Northern Kongu region, while Southern Kongu was added to it after the advent of the Cholas. The ancient Kongu covered the two areas namely Mala Kongu and Kuda Kongu or Mi Kongu¹⁰.

Boundaries of the Kongu Country

The Tamil work Kongu Mandala Sadakam refers to the boundaries of Kongu Nadu as follows:

1. Vadakkut-thalamalayam vaikavur therkku.
2. Kudakku vellipporuppu kunru-kilakku.
3. Kulittandalai sulum kavirinannada.
4. Kalittandalai-alavum Kongu.

Boundaries of Kongu Country - Directions Boundary

1. North Talamalai.
2. South Vaikavur.
3. East Kulittalai.
4. West Velimalai.

From the demarcation it can be understood today, that the whole of the modern districts- of Coimbatore, Erode, the Nilgiris and Salem (excluding Attur Taluk), Palani Taluk. of Dindugal district and Karur district extending as far as Kulittalai were the parts of the Kongu Nadu". From the first century of the Christian era as mentioned earlier the Kongu Nadu remained a separate region either increasing or decreasing in size according to the valour and victories of the rulers. It is certain that Kongu Nadu was independent right from the early times. But Pulankurichi inscription of Sendan Kurran refers to the two main divisions of the Kongu Nadu. The part of Kongu Nadu which was to the east of river Kaveri was called Mala Kongu, while the other part, which was to the west of the river, was named Kuda Kongu or Mi Kongu¹². Velvikudi plates of 770 A.D. states, Puviriyum polircholai kaviriyakkadandittaalamaina varsilaiyin mala kongam adippaduttum¹³. It refers to the king Pandya Arikesari Maravarman crossing the river Kaveri, with its groves of trees and tanks of budding flowers, and subjugating Mala Kongu with the help of his beautiful long bow. The Sri varamangalam plate states, that Pandya king defeated and imprisoned the king of Kuda Kongu¹⁴. The Dalavaypuram plates of Viranarayana dated 905 A.D. mentions the term Konginru and Kuda Kongu thereby confirming the existence of Western Ghats as the western boundary of the Kongu country¹⁵. From the epigraphical evidences, the existence of Kuda Kongu and Mala Kongu can be confirmed. These two were



later merged together and it assumed the name Vada Kongu i.e., the North Kongu during the medieval period. Mala Kongam is referred to in the Tiruchchengodu copper plate of Parantaka II or Sundara Chola 16. It comprises the area to the north east of Kaveri River on account of the existence of the Malavar community. Since this area was controlled by the chief called Kolli Malayan, it was called by the name East Kongu or Mala Kongu 7. The ancient limits of the Kongu country were the Western Ghats in the west, the Kollimalai and Karaipittanaru in the east, while in the north it was surrounded by hills that separate the same from Ganga Nadu in the west and Toppur River in the east. The southern border includes the taluk of Kulittalai and represented by Konadu of the Irungovels. The Mi Kongu and Mala Kongu regions that were in vogue during the 10th century had been amalgamated together and a new name, Vada Kongu had been coined during the medieval times 18.

Physiography of the Region

The Vada Kongu comprises the region on either side of the Noyyal River and a major portion of the Salem district besides Karur and Kulittalai which lay to the South of Kaveri. In the medieval period Kongu Nadu had 30 territorial sub divisions (Nadus). Of these 20 Nadus can be brought under the label Vada Kongu 19. Vada Kongu included the following Nadus: Vadakarai Nadu, Kilpa Nadu, Kanchikkuval Nadu, Vada-Parisara Nadu, Kurupa Nadu, Virasola Valanadu, Valuppukka Nadu, Kangaiyan Nadu, Idaippuludi Nadu, Thattaiyur Nadu, Ven gala Nadu, Kilanga Nadu, Araiya Nadu, Vadakarai Manalur Nadu, Talaiyur Nadu, Tenkarai Nadu, Ponkalurka Nadu, Naraiyanur Nadu, Anda Nadu and Pundurai Nadu. The seven Saivaite temples and their locations in the particular Nadu are given in the table below:

Location of the Seven Saivaite Temples

1. Ardhanariswarar Temple Tiruchchengodu Pundurai Nadu.
2. Muruganathiswarar Temple Tirumuruganpundi Vada Parisara Nadu.
3. Avinasiswarar Temple Avinasi Vada Parisara Nadu.
4. Pasupatheeswarar Temple Karur Vengala Nadu.
5. Vikxithiswarar Temple Venjamankudalur Vengala Nadu.
6. Sangameswarar Temple Bhavani Vadakarai Nadu.
7. Magudeeswarar Temple Kodumudi Araiya Nadu.

From the literary evidences the scholar has proved the existence of these seven Saivaite temples from the 7th century A.D. onwards. In these seven temples the Tevaram trio, Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar had sung in praise of these deities and the importance of these places. These three saints occupy a pre-eminent position in the Tamilian Saivaite world and therefore they are called Muvarmutalika 20. Of these three saints, Sambandar and Appar were contemporaries, while Sundarar came after them. Appar was the contemporary of Mahendravarman, the Pallava ruler 21 (whom he had converted to Saivism). Mahendravarman belonged to the first part of the 7th century A.D. Sambandar, who was a younger contemporary of Appar belongs to the last part of the 7th century 22. Sundarar refers to these two Great saints Sambandar and Appar with great reverence and love. In great humility, he sings that he is only repeating what these two great saints have sung. Therefore by his time, it can be construed that the two saints and their poems must have become very popular and authoritative. So, it may be bested here that his period can be assigned to 9th century A.D. 23. The on mastic study of the seven places where the seven Saivaite temples are located throws a valuable light on their history. The etymology of these places are of great lexical interest.

Tiruchchengodu

Tiruchchengodu, a sacred place of Kongu and also a royal city as justified by Sekkilar, was located in Pundurai Nadu during the medieval period. Pundurai Nadu was considered as the foremost among the 24 Nadus of Kongu 24. Pundurai Nadu was skirted by the three rivers, Ponni (Kaveri), Vani (Bhavani) and Kanchi (Noyyal). It is mentioned as 'Ponni Nadi, Vani Nadi and Kanchi Nadi Sulkinra Pundurai Nadu' 25. It had two divisions. They were named according to the direction as Melkarai Pundurai Nadu - the division on the western bank and Kilkarai Pundurai Nadu - the division on the eastern bank, which included parts of Tiruchchengodu taluk of the Salem district 26. Tiruchchengodu served as the head quarters of a division which is evident from the inscriptions of Rajakesari and lies on the high road that linked Avinasi and Perur, in the western part of Kongu along with Salem in Sella Nadu 27. A road from Tiruchchengodu passes eastward through Kumaramangalam into the Elur Nadu. Tiruchchengodu is located at a distance of 45 Km from Salem. It has a hoary past. As a place of Saivaite importance, the deity enshrined here has been sung by early Nayanmars 28. The Tamil saint Sambandar had visited Tiruchchengodu and had sung a hymn on the presiding deity on this hill and has personified Lord Siva in the aspect of Ardhanariswarar 29. This hill is red in colour and hence called Sengunrur (chengodu) 3°. The hill bends like a snake and hence it is called Nagari or Nagarpallam 31. There is spring at the foot of Lord Ardhanariswarar in the sanctum on the hill top 32. At the time of Sambandar's visit the place seemed to have been a malarious tract 33. The local people prayed for relief



from the disease³⁴. Sambandar sang a song in³¹the name of Tirunilakandan to get the place rid of this scourge and the prayer was granted³⁵.

Tiruchchengodu was a place of strategic importance which served as a capital city for the local rulers. It is also referred to as 'Aravagiri Sulnda Elukarai Nadu' ¹³⁶. The fact that Elukarai Nadu was the name given to Konguis revealed from the records of Parantaka ¹³⁷. The highway from Avinasi to Perur passes through Tiruchchengodu. Tirugnana Sambandar in his Tevaramhymn describes Tiruchchengodu as Kodimadachchengunrur, meaning Sengunrur as the city of terraced buildings with flags³⁸. Sekkilar mentions this place as containing a high fortress³⁹. Tiruchchengodu was surrounded by Aravagiri, a hill mentioned as Nagamalai and Panimalai. In the inscriptions of the Cholas and Pandyas the place is referred to as Tiruchchengodu which is included in Kilkarai Pundurai Nadu in Vira Cholamandalam.

Tiruchchengodu is known by various names such as Nagachala, Panimalai, Aravagiri, Vayumalai, Kongumalai, Nagamalai, Vandimalai, Siddharmalai, Sonagiri, Brahmagiri, Dan tagiri etc⁴⁰. It is surrounded by Erode in the West, Sankagiri in the North, Paramati in the South and Namakkal in the East. This place is not only of Saivaite importance but also a place of the abode of the deity Lord Muruga or Subrahmanya⁴². The four faces of the hill are compared to the serpent, the linga, the masculine and feminine form³² respectively. On account of the serpentine look, the hill came to be called Nagamalai. In the work of Kandarabuthi, Arunagirinadhar mentions the hill as Nagachala⁴³. The hill can be approached by road as well as by flight of steps. The hillock of Lord Muruga is also called Neduvel Nedukundram⁴⁴ which is described in the epic Silappathikaram by Elangovadigal. He also has written that Kannagi, the heroine of the epic reaches a hill after the destruction of Madurai and thereafter goes to the other world accompanied by her dead husband Kovalan. This hill has been identified as Tiruchchengodu. In the hymns of Tevaram, sung by Tiruganasambandar there is a reference to Chengunrur which is believed to be Tiruchchengodu⁴⁵. The toponymy of the place Tiruchchengodu can be studied under three components namely Tiru+Chen+Godu, meaning a 'Sacred Red Mountain' ¹⁴⁶. The hillock has derived this name due to the red stains on its sides.

According to the legendary account, a dispute arose between the God of Wind (Vayubagavan) and Serpent king (Adishesha) as to who among the two was more powerful. The contest happened in such a way that Adishesha coiled himself around Mount Meru and Vayubagavan tried to drag him off. In this struggle the storm was said to be so severe, that it dislodged one of the hills and tore the serpent's hood. The mountain peak was stained by the serpent's blood and thus it got the name Tiruchchengodu (red stain mountain) and hillock came to be called Nagamalai or Serpent hill or Nagarpalla^{M47}. The hill assumed importance on account of the sixtieth step known as sathiya padi or oath path." Disputes are often settled here by one party challenging the other to swear on each step to the justice of the claim, extinguishing the burning of camphor in the usual manner. It is believed that no one dares to lie for fear of divine wrath. This is one of the famous places in Tamil Nadu and there were instances where oaths sworn on the flight of steps received recognition of the judiciary^o. From the record, it is learnt that the temple at Tiruchchengodu should have come into existence as early as the 9th year of Chola Parantaka I (916 A.D.)⁵⁰. This is an indirect reference to the temple of a hill where the body Tiruvonaganapperumakkal functioned⁵¹. In a record of Parantaka I dated in his 28th year (935 A.D.), the deity is referred to as Tiruchchengottupperumanadigal. The temple dedicated to this deity is mentioned in a record of the same date as the temple on the hill (Tirumalai Mel) at Tiruchchengodu⁵². Tiruchchengodu had a big assembly represented by the members of 12 Nadus. Tiruchchengodu had assumed an important status as early as the reign period of Chola Parantaka I, on account of the endowment³⁴ and supervision of the functions of the temple. The assembly at Tiruchchengodu had a number of executive bodies like Tiruvona Ganapperumakkal, Tiruvadirai Ganapperumakkal etc⁵³. These bodies had been constituted to look after the functions in the temple on the specific occasions. Kongu Mandala Sadakam is a work that refers to a Sangam, at Tiruchchengodu wherein the poets of Kongu region used to meet to transact their academic business i.e., Kongu Pulavar Sangam kudum Tiruchchengodu⁵⁴. This establishes the fact that Tiruchchengodu served as a cultural centre with historic prominence.

A record of the 12th year of Parakesari i.e., Parantaka I (919 A.D.) refers to Uttaman Ganavadi, a member of the assembly known as Sonattupperumakka¹⁵⁵. It was at this place that the members of the Mahasabha met and transacted their activities. There is also citation of Pandi Nadu in Tiruchchengodu while a gift was being entrusted to the Perumakkal during the reign of Rajakesari (Rajaraja I). Besides the Chola Nadu, Pandi Nadu also had Tiruchchengodu as a part which gives a conclusion that Tiruchchengodu was a big city known for administrative functions. Tiruchchengodu was included in Kilkarai Pundurai Nadu in Kongu alias Vira Cholamandalam, during the reign period of Vijayanagara king Narasimha Raya, who ruled over this region prior to the Tuluva king, Krishna Deva Maharaya during 15th century⁵⁶. Narasimha Raya belongs to the Saluva family⁵⁷. The deities Ardhanariswara and Subrahmanya to whom the grant was made are enshrined atop the hill at Tiruchchengodu⁵⁸.



Karur

Karur, the seat of the Cheras was included in the Vengala Nadu in the early period⁵⁹. The name Vengala Nadu had been derived because of a hillock found two miles north east of Karur called Vennai-malai or Butter Mountain. It was as cool as butter and hence named Vennai-malai⁶⁰. Amaravati is the major river in Karur district⁶¹. The early records speak of the rule of Irumporai family, a branch of the Cheras over this region⁶². Karur served as the secondary capital of the Cheras. Padirrupattu, a Tamil literary work of the Sangam period mentions about this place. To keep the extensive coastal trade under their control and to safeguard the merchants from piracy, the Chera rulers maintained two capitals- one at the coast line and another at the interior. Sangam literature refers to the ports like Men tai, Musiri, Naravan and Tondi on the west coast. Periplus refers to some of these ports as the royal seat of the Cheras. But Ptolemy confirms the Sangam literature and mentions Karur as the capital of the Cheras⁶³.

The location of Karur on the bank of river Amaravati in the eastern frontier of Kongu Nadu is different from Skandapura with which the ancient Kongu rulers were associated⁶⁴. The Kongapperuvali connected with Karur came to be called Konganperuvali⁶⁵. The ancient capital city Karur is also mentioned as Tiruanilai in the records of Rajendra⁶⁶. In Tevaram, the etymology of the place Karu+Ur is mentioned as

1. Tondelamalar tuviyettatan.
2. Sundalaruyiray tan maiyar.
3. Kandanar Karvur-ulanilai.
4. Andanar ul unbare.

The high way called Karaitturaipperuvali has been identified with the road that connects Karur and Dharapuram. Karaittura is the same as Karattolu that is approachable from Dharapuram to Dalavaypattinam⁶⁷. Karur served as a trade centre in the early days which is well established by the discovery of the number of coins belonging to the Roman period in the Amaravati river basin⁶⁸. Karur was linked by a number of trade routes. Karur was also called Mudivalangu solapuram⁶⁹. In a record of Kulottunga III dated in his 23rd year (1201 A.D.) the name Mudivalangu Cholapuram has been attributed to the place Karur a city in Kongu also known as Chola Kerala Mandalam". Yet in another record of the same king it is mentioned that Karuvur was surrounded by places like Tevanampalli, Somur and Tirunombalurpuram etc⁷¹. The deity of this place is referred to as Tiruanilai Mahadevar (the Lord of the Sacred Cow-Stable), while the Sanskritised name Pasupatiswara is also frequently referred⁷².

Tirumuruganpundi

Tirumuruganpundi and Avinasi are included in Vadaparaisara Nadu⁷³. The high road from Perur and Kovanputhur (Coimbatore) lay inside Vadaparaisara Nadu and ran past Manniyur (Annur), Nallur, Ukkiram, Vinnappalli and reached Satyamangalam from where it proceeded northwards into the Ganga country⁷⁴. Tirumuruganpundi is located to the north west of Tiruppur and to the east of Nallur. The river Nalluru, a tributary of Noyyal flows through Tirumuruganpundi before it joins the east of Nallur. Tirumuruganpundi is probably Periyapalayam wherein a mud fort can be seen. Sundarar's Tevaram discloses that Tirumuruganpundi was a great city (Managar) populated by Vadugar and others. Kodagu Venchilai Vaduga, Veduvar Muruga Nariya, Vadugar Val Murugan Pundi⁷⁵.

This great city of Kongu located on the bank of river Nalluru, near Periyapalayam had assumed importance due to various factors. There is a belief that after killing Sura, the asura, Lord Muruga installed a lingam at this place and worshiped him to get rid off the after-effects of such killing. The place is therefore named as Tirumuruganpundi⁷⁶. According to a legend, on his way to Tiruvarur, Sundarar happened to pass through this place with some property which was presented to him by Sri Cheraman Perumal. In order to test his devotion, Lord Siva sent his bhutaganas in the guise of hunters to steal the property from him. Having lost all his property to the hunters sent by Lord Siva, Saint Sundarar came to this shrine and sang a Tel; aram requesting the lord for the restoration of his property. At this the Lord was immensely pleased and returned to him all his properties⁷⁷. Sekkilar in his famous Periapuranam extols this incident.

Rinadhar also praised this shrine in Thiruppugazh. The Managara mentioned in the Tevaram hymns is an extension area like Tiruppur, Kurakkuttai and Mukandanur etc. It is believed that Kandapura the early capital of Kongudesa has been identified with anuruganpundi- 78. It was also called Parantakapuram alias Rajarajapuramongu Vanchi⁷⁹. Tirumuruganpundi included in Vadaparaisara Nadu, was surrounded by the sacred tanks called Agni Tirtham, Gnana Tirtham, Madavi Tirtham etc⁸⁰. The suffix pundi given to it is justified by the existence of a number of water borne tanks all around. The inscriptions of Kongu rulers and Ummattur chiefs mention the term Tirumuruganpundi⁸¹. This place assumed greater importance on account of it being worshipped by Kanda or Muruga. The association of Cheraman Perumal Nayanar and Sundaramurtis Nayanar proved the historical importance of the temple⁸².



Avinasi

Avinasi also called Tiruppukkoliyur⁸³ was included in Kuda Kongu in early days. In all literary works the name Avinasi or Avinasi is found mentioned often. A greater part of the western part of the Avinasi taluk was included in Punganikka Nadu, a part of Vadaparaisara Nadu⁸⁴. Avinasi was linked with Perur in the western side of Kongu by a highway called the Rajakesari Peruvalli⁸⁵, which is referred to in the inscription. It linked Perur, Avinasi etc in the north of Noyyal. Nallaru was the river that flowed from the upper regions of Tiruppukoliyur. This place was sung by Sundaramurti Nayanar. The name 'Pukkoliyur' has been attributed to the place Avinasi on account of the swallowing of a boy by a crocodile⁸⁷. The expression Avinasi literally means the indestructible. The Tevaram hymns refer to the expression Vinasi and Avinasi meaning destructible and indestructible.

In the Tevaram hymns Sundaramurti Nayanar has sung ten verses in praise of Lord Siva in Avinasi⁸⁸. The fourth verse mentions the episode of the crocodile swallowing a child. He prays to Lord Siva to give back the child which was swallowed by the crocodile and finally succeeded. He praises him in Tevaram through the following lines:

Erran marakken elumaikkum emperumanaiye
Urrayen- unnaiye ulkukinren unarndu ullattal
Puradarava pukkoliyur Avinasiye
Parraga valven pasupatiye paramati ⁸⁹.

A similar legend narrates the recovery of the lingam from a fish. According to this, Gurunatha Pandaram was a staunch devotee of Avinashiligeswarar and he did Siva puja regularly. Due to heavy rain the tank bund was in spate at the breaking point. So the officers who came to the dam to avoid the floods with numerous workers arrogantly ordered the Pandaram who was performing the Siva puja at that time on the tank bund to move away. As Gurunatha was deeply involved in his Siva puja, he did not hear their orders. At this the officers ridiculed him as a false saint and threw the lingam into the tank. Gurunatha Pandaram performed severe penance for days and nights together to get back his sacred lingam. Lord Siva instigated a divine fish to spit out the lingam from its mouth in front of the devotee⁹⁰. Thus Gurunatha Pandaram felt extremely happy at the restoration of the lingam. These two incidents, restoration of the boy from the mouth of the crocodile and spitting of the lingam by a fish have been depicted in a stone carving on a side of the lamp pillar in front of the main Avinasi Appartment⁹¹.

The inscriptions of the Kongu rulers like Vira Narayana, Kulottunga Chola, Vira Chola, Vira Rajendra, Sundara Pandya, Vira Pandya etc, mention this place Avinasi and the deity enshrined in the temple as Avinasi Aludaiyanayanar⁹². A record of Rajakesari Varman, Vira Pandya dated 1274 A.D. specifically refers to the inclusion of Avinasi in the division of Vadaparaisara Nadu⁹³. Pukkoliyur is found mentioned in one of the records of Sundara Pandya from Avinasi dated in 1296 A.D. in connection with the construction of a temple dedicated to Sundaramurti Nayanar⁹⁴. The place Tiruppukoliyur wherein the temple of the deity Aludaiyanayanar has been enshrined is found mentioned in an epigraph of Vira Ballala dated 1322 A.D.⁹⁵ Avinasi is referred to as Dhakshina Varanasi, i.e., Dhakshina Kasi in contrast to the Utara Kasi that is the present Varanasi. In the imprecatory portion of this record the banks of the sacred river Ganges is referred to. This indicates the northern Kasi lying on its bank⁹⁶. Utara Kasi has been always held in high esteem right from the ancient period. Except for a general stream called Nallaru which rises from the upland of Annur and flows through the ancient Pukkoliyur or Avinasi no other bigger river is known from the records. In all probability, the term Dhakshina Varanasi has been mentioned by the composer of the record in order to attach more importance to the place of the worship of the deity Siva called Avinasi lingam⁹⁷. It is to this deity enshrined in the form of linga, gifts had been made by the merchants during the period of Vira Nanjaraya Udaiyad dated 1497 A.D.⁹⁸. Another record of this Vira Chikkaraya Udaiyar dated 1508 A.D. registers a gift of land to the same god of Dhakshina Varanasi⁹⁹. So this new name continued to have been coined to the place during the reign period of Ummattur chiefs of 15th and 16th centuries A.D. Tenpalli was the name attributed to a portion of Avinasi, where in the bund of a tank, a temple dedicated to Sundara Nayanar was built by the Pandya king Sundara Pandya¹⁰⁰. The Devadana village to the deity Avinasi Aludaiyanayanar called Tenpallinattam alias Sitagaraganallur was carved out during the time of Vira Ballala, the Hoysala king¹⁰¹. It may be inferred from this that Tenpalli was close to Tiruppukoliyur the other name of Avinasi. This inscriptional evidence proves the historicity of the temple and the place.

Kodumudi

Kodumudi also called as Pan dikkodumudi is located on the bank of river Kaveri and is close to Salem and Erode districts. It was included in Melkarai Araiya Nadu¹⁰². Araiya Nadu was the name of a division of Kongu, which lay on either side of Kaveri. The western part was called Melkarai Araiya Nadu and the eastern part was named Kilkarai Araiya Nadu. Araiya Nadu was named after Araiya, who were prominent in that area, just like Kurumbas in Kurumba Nadu and Puluvas in Puluva Nadu. Araiya Nadu had another name called Kaveri Nadu or Akkaveri Nadu. The Melkarai Araiya Nadu included



several places including Kodumudi, the limit of which has been extended up to Tirukattutturai. Kodumudi has a hoary past. In the Sangam work like Ahananuru, Kodumudi is described as Amurkakkum Kodumudi whose chieftains were conquered by Selkelukuttuvan. The Amur that is mentioned above is close to Kodumudi. The expression Pandikkodumudi is referred to in the hymns of Tirugnanasambandar and Sundarar. In the Velvikudi plates of Pandya king Nedunchadaiyan, the son of Rajashimha is referred to as Arikesari Parankusa Maravarman also called Termaran. He is described as one who reached Kodumudi on the banks of Kaveri after his victory in a number of wars in the Kongu country¹⁰³. All the three eminent poets of Saivism viz., Tirugnanasambandar, Appar and Sundarar visited this place and each one composed a Tevaram Patikam each about this temple¹⁰⁴. Sundarar in his hymn locates the Siva temple along the bank of river Kaveri. A special feature of this shrine is the expounding of the doctrine of trinity by the Presence of Trimurtis viz., Lord Brahma, Vishnu and Siva together in the same place¹⁰⁵. The union of Lord Siva and Vishnu in all processions signifies the collaboration of Saivism and Vaishnavism in a harmonious unity. The direct penetration of the sun's rays on the images of Swamy and Amman for four days during the months of Avani and Panguni indicates the offering of puja to the lord by the Sun God which is known as Surya puja¹⁰⁶.

The hill ridges of Arachalur, Elumathur hills and Yettimalai are not far away from Kodumudi. The Yettimalai to the west of Kodumudi and Avudaiyaparai served as a resistant to the flood waters of Kaveri to a great extent¹⁰⁷. The expression 'Kodu' signifies the Almighty. While the word 'Mudi' indicates the rest of the phenomenon witnessed here. This name has been applied to the rock formation submerged under the alluvium with a protuberance which has taken to be the Mudi. The term also signifies the natural phallus of the linga. The termination of the Mudi from where the river Kaveri moved southwards when it was forced to change its course is significant to note¹⁰⁸. There are a number of legends connected to this temple. According to the local Sthalapuram in a war between Adishesha and Vayubagavan, Adishesha coiled around Mount Meru and Vayubagavan with all his ferocity dashed against it and blew it up to pieces. During this, five big chips of the Mount Meru fell in five different places, and one among them is Kodumudi which shape itself in the form of a lingam¹⁰⁹. Saint Arunagirinadhar composed two verses in his famous Thiruppugazh about this temple. Sri Vadhutha Muni composed verses of the Sthalapuram in Sanskrit, while Sri Venkataramanadasar of Samakkulam published the same in Tamil verses. Sri V.R. Deiva Sigamani Gounder has written in prose the history of this place and the shrine. References are made about the shrine in the works of Sekkilar, Eyarkon Kalikkamar and in the Padhinoram Thirumurai of 'Sivaperuman Thiruvirattai Manimalai' composed by Kabiladeva Nayanar. Kodumudi Kuravanji and Kaliyannan Kuravanji by Sri Bala Bharathiyar; Vadivulla Nayagi Panjarathinam and Kongumandala Cheyulgal by Sri Deiva Sigamani Gounder also praise the shrine and the place. Sekkilar has sung in praise of this place as 'Konginirponni-tten Karaik Karaiyur Kodumudiyir. The name Karaiyur is also found mentioned in the inscriptions and it possibly refers to Tirupandikkodumudi. The other terminology applied to this place is called Karasai. In common parlance this place came to be called Mukutesalingasthalam.

Tiruvendamkudal Ur

Tiruvendamkudalur is located on the eastern bank of the river Kudavanar (Sirraru), about 15 miles to the south of Karur in Karur taluk. Sundarar in his hymns mentions the location of Venjamankudalur on the eastern bank of Sirraru. It was included in Vengala Nadu; a subdivision of Vira Kerala Cholamandalam also called Kongu Venjamankuda¹¹². This region was bounded by Thattaiya Nadu and Talaiya Nadu. Vengala Nadu was in turn included in Vada Kongu. The river Kudavanar flows from the Dindugal region adjoining the Palani taluk in Andhra Pradesh and joins the river Santanavardhani which flows into Karur region after traversing through the area of Vedasandur, Pampur and further proceeds past into Venjamankudalur before it finally joins the Amaravati, north west of Kodaiyur¹¹³. The place assumed its name on account of the confluence of the river Kudavanar and Sirraru. In the inscriptions of Vira Rajendra and the Pandya king Jatavarman Sundara Pandya, the place is referred to as Venjamankudalu⁴. It was included in Vengala Nadu during the 12th century A.D.

Bhavani

Bhavani is located at the confluence of the two rivers Vani and Kaveri and situated in Vadakarai Nadu¹¹⁵. A vast area that lay north of Noyyal River extending up to the northern frontiers of Kongu was designated as Vadakarai Nadu. Melvani and Kilvani rivers are the southern boundary of Vadakarai Nadu, which comprised major parts of the northern taluk of Bhavani. The river Vani taking a slightly south easterly course moves on and after having traveled more than 108 miles from its origin finally merges with the Kaveri at the sacred place of Tiru Nana, well known as Vanikuda¹¹⁶. The temple at the confluence (Sangama) is called Sangameswara shrine. The Kongu Mandala Sadakam traces its location to the north of Vani River. The other name of Bhavani was Tirunana which had been identified with the south bank of the river Kaveri¹¹⁷. To the north of this sacred place is the hill called Urasikottai or Uratchimalai. This hill is known as Vadakarai's. The Melvani and Kilvani in the earlier days served as the southern boundary of the Vadakarai Nadu which comprised of the major portion of Bhavani taluk. This place was sung by Tirugnanasambandar in his Tevaram hymns. The place where the rivers Kaveri, Bhavani and Amudhanadi (Antarvahini) join came to be called Mukkudal or Bhavani Kuda¹¹⁹. It was surrounded by the



is Padmagiri, Nagagiri, Sankagiri, Vedagiri and Mangalagiri¹²⁰. In common parlance it is said that for those who worship the deity of this place, nothing untoward would happen to them. Tiruganasambandar, the famous Saiva saint describes this place as Nana in his Tevaram hymns as: "Senden teliyolirat-temanganinyuthirrkum tirunanave 121" The Sthalapuranam states that a stream sprang from the Amudtheertha to join the confluence. The spring is believed to be invisible and is therefore called 'Antharvahini'. The confluence of the three rivers is known as 'Thriveni Sangamam' and 'Dhakshina Prayag', similar to the one at Allahabad¹²². This Koodal Sangamam is a beautiful spot with tall, shady trees on either side lending serenity or charm to the place. A large number of pilgrims congregate at this part, to have a dip in the river, and worship the Lord. Another interesting incident about this temple is, at the commencement of the 19th century the British administrator had appointed William Garo as the collector of the Salem District of the Madras.

The district headquarters was Bhavani. One night, when the fast asleep in his official residence a charming little girl, in costumes woke him up. Mr. Garo pursued the maiden although he was compelled by a divine command. As soon as they left the house, a devilish fulmination razed the official residence, to the ground.

The administrator was nonplussed. The little girl escorted him to the entrance of the local Siva temple and disappeared. Mr. Garo believed that this was one of the merciful deeds of Vedanayaki Amman who resided eternally at the temple. As a token of gratitude he gifted an ivory palanquin to the Goddess. The date of the gift is inscribed as 1/01/1804 beneath the palanquin. He became an ardent devotee of the Goddess. Hindu customs forbade him to enter the sanctum of the temple. It is stated that three holes were bored on the outer walls of the garbhagriha; to enable Garo to have a darshan of the deity from a distance¹²³. Bhavani is one of the important Saivaite temples of Kongu Nadu. This place had been sung by Tiruganasambandar. He visited the place Bhavani and mentioned it as Nana, Tirunana and Sacred Nana. In his ten hymns he enumerates various forms of Siva as Vinadhara, Ardhanariswara, Gaja Samhara Murti, Tripurantaka Siva, Bhikshatana and Lingodhbhava. The fertile nature of this location is also traced out. Arunagirinadhar has dedicated a poem to Lord Subrahmanya stationed at this temple. Mahavidwan Vasudeva Mudaliar has composed a Sthalapurana entitled, Bhavani Kudal Purana. It consists of 901 verses contained in 18 chapters.

The Sthalapurana asserts that evils do not befall people who sincerely worship here. Hence the place was known as 'Tirunana' or 'Nannavar' in olden days¹²⁴. To sum up, in this chapter, the early history of Kongu Nadu is traced and its separate identity is also known. Its boundaries and the various divisions and subdivisions of the region based on water sources and other demarcating points are studied. Basically Kongu Nadu was divided into Vada Kongu and Then Kongu. Mala Kongu and Mikongu were the other two divisions mentioned in some literature and historic charters. The 30 Nadus made during the medieval period is studied. The seven sanctified Saivaite centres and their locations, geographical divisions where • in which they are included are also traced out. Thus the seven Saivaite temples and places have their own historicity which had been proved through inscription and literatures. The historicity of these temples are attested with the visit of the three Nayanmars-Appar, Sundarar and Sambandar. The identification of the places as well as the mentioning of the deities of the seven temples in their hymns justifies the fact. The inscriptions found in these seven temples glorify the rule of various dynasties and its historicity. Every temple had its own myth and miracle which is now known to us through the sculptures and the historicity has also been passed down through the ages.

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