

POLITICAL CONDITIONS IN ANCIENT TRAVANCORE

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The first chapter of Mr. S. Sanku Aiyar's thesis on "Ancient Travancore" appeared in the May Number of "Travancore Information and Listener" and dealt with the origins of Travancore. In the present article he traces the political history of Travancore in those far off days as disclosed by the sources mentioned in the previous one.

OUR attention may first be directed to the western sources, especially the *Periplus of the Erythraean sea* and Ptolemy's geography, which are the most suitable for our purpose. The *Periplus* was a guide-book written by an Alexandrian traveller, who visited India about 80 A. D., for the use of the Roman merchants who were engaged in trade with eastern countries. In this small book, the portion that is of interest to us is the account of the countries and governments in the west coast of India, especially those in "Damirike" or "Familakom". The author's description of this part of India is indeed very enlightening. "To the kingdom under the sway of Keprobtras, Tundis is subject, a village of great note situated near the sea. Mouziris, which pertains to the same realm, is a city at the height of prosperity, frequented as it is by ships from Ariake, and Greek ships from Egypt. It lies near a river at a distance from Tundis of 500 stadia, which is measured from river to river or by the length of the sea voyage, and it is 20 stadia distant from the mouth of its own river. The distance

of Nelcynda from Mouziris is also nearly 500 stadia, whether measured from river to river or by the sea voyage, but it belongs to a different kingdom, that of Pandion. It likewise is situated near a river and at about a distance from the sea of 120 stadia. At the very mouth of this river is another village, Bakare, to which the ships despatched from Nelcynda come down empty and ride at anchor off shore while taking in cargo; for the river, it may be noted, has sunken reefs and shallows which make its navigation difficult. The sign by which those who come hither by sea know they are nearing land is their meeting with snakes which are here of a black colour, not so long as those already mentioned, like serpents about the head, and with eyes of the colour of blood. After Bakare occurs the mountain called Pyrrhos (or the red) towards the south, near another district of the country called Paralia where the pearl-fisheries are, which belong to Pandion and a city of the name of Kolkhoi. In this tract, the first place met with is called Balita, which has a good harbour and a village on its shore.

Next to this is another place called Komar, where is the Cape of the same name and haven".¹

Identification of Names

From the foregoing extract it may be gathered that the region extending from Tundis to Nelcynda on the west coast of India was within the kingdom of Keprobotra, while the territory lying to the south of it from Nelcynda to Komar in which the ports of Bakare and Balita stood belonged to King Pandian.

Who was Keprobotra? Where are Tundis, Mouziris, Nelcynda, Bakare and Komar? Scholars agree that the term Keprobotra found in the Periplus is no other than Keralaputra mentioned in the Girnar inscription of Asoka (250 B. C.) and that it refers to the Chera dynasty of Kings in South India². Tundis, Mouziris and Komar have also been correctly indentified, the first with the town of Kadalundi in North Malabar, the second with Kōdungallur in Cochin State, and the third with Cape Comorin, the Land's End of India. But the last word on the identification of Nelcynda and Bakare has not been said. To understand correctly the relation of Travancore with other Kingdoms in South India, the exact location of the above places, especially that of Nelcynda, is of great importance, as it is stated in the Periplus that the Chera Kingdom

extended only as far South as Nelcynda, and that the latter place and the region lying to the south of it up to Komar were part of the Pandya Kingdom.

Where is Nelcynda then? Col. Yule identifies Nelcynda with Kallada, now a small village by the side of a river of the same name, 12 miles north-east of Quilon³, but he provides no proofs. In his interesting book "Cera Kings of the Sangam period" the late Mr. K. G. Sesa Aiyar has suggested that Nelcynda is Neendakara, near Quilon⁴. Though the word Nelcynda somewhat resembles in sound the word Neendakara, the description of Nelcynda contained in the Periplus does not suit Neendakara. It would be more appropriate to follow the lead of Col. Yule, and identify Nelcynda with Kallada. The tenor of the whole passage in the Periplus shows that its author had in view the ports and the market places on the coast of the Ashtamudi lake, near Quilon, when he recounted the importance of Nelcynda and Bakare; that he considered the Ashtamudi lagoon wherein the Kallada river emptied itself as a broad debouchure of the river at its mouth; that he called the Kallada market on the bank of the Kallada river, Nelcynda; and that he applied the name Bakare to Quilon⁵.

1. Mc. Crindle. Ind. Ant. Vol. VIII (1879) pp. 145-48.

2. Caldwell. Comparative Grammar of Dravidian languages. p. 95.

3. Sewell's lists of Antiquities. Vol. I. p. 256.

4. Cera Kings of the Sangam period. p. 144. Foot-note.

5. See note 30 at the end of the chapter.

It was stated that Venad lay between the Kannētti river on the north and the Kannyakumari sea on the south. Where was Kannētti? There is a hamlet of that name, with a rivulet flowing by in the Karunagapally taluk, 14 miles north of Quilon. There is also a small temple dedicated to Siva, locally known as Kannētti-Tēvar. That hamlet must have been the Kannētti of traditional fame. But Col. Yule thinks that Kallada was the Kannētti of the ancients. He does not give any reason for this identification. Kannētti in the Karunagapalli taluk and Kallada are situated more or less in the same latitude. The recognition of this fact will be sufficient for the present purpose. According to the Periplus and the book of Ptolemy, this line was the southern boundary of the Chera Kingdom. We are justified in inferring from this, that Venad commenced where the Chera Kingdom terminated in the south.

Venad a Pandya Country ?

We gather from the Periplus that in the days of its author the country lying immediately to the south of the Chera Kingdom was under the sway of the Pandya Kings. This leads us to the conclusion that in the first century A. D. Venad was under the rule of the Pandyas. But whether it was a division of the Pandya Kingdom governed by Pandyan officers or a separate political unit acknowledging the suzerainty of the Pandyan Kings, the Periplus does not say.

Now let us turn to Ptolemy's geography, another interesting book written about A. D. 140. According to it, the Chera Kingdom was bordered on the south by the Āy territory, which extended from Melcynda (Nelcynda of the Periplus) to Cape Comorin; Melcynda, Bammala (Balita) and the metropolis of Kōttiara were situated in this territory; and it was only past Comaria or Cape Comorin that other regions including the Pandya Kingdom commenced⁶.

From the foregoing we find that, on the political status of Venad, there is thus some difference of opinion between the two ancient authors. While the Periplus definitely says that the region, which we now call Venad formed part of the Pandyan Kingdom, Ptolemy regards it as the country of the Āys. And who were the Āys? Were they a tribe as suggested by certain scholars,⁷ or a family of Kings. If the latter, were they independent ruling Kings or only chiefs paying homage to a suzerain power? Ptolemy does not answer these questions.

Sangam Literature

Before attempting to explain these apparently inconsistent statements, we may profitably examine the third and the most fruitful source of information, namely, the literature of the Sangam period. It is an established fact that the authors of this literature were mostly

6. Mc. Crindle. Ind. Ant. Vol. XIII p. 329.

7. P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar. History of the Tamils (1929) p. 318.

court-poets, who had special opportunities to sing about contemporary personages and events. Thus the Sangam works are of unassailable value,⁸ and of which, the most important for the present purpose are Puranānūru, Aganānūru Patittu-pattu and Pathu-pattu. The texts and colophons of these collec-

tions have preserved from oblivion, among other interesting facts, the names and domestic histories, and the civil and military achievements, of several Tamil Kings and chiefs, of whom three exercised dominion over Venad or Travancore.

Who was Andiran ?

One of the princes or chiefs mentioned in the Sangam works is Andiran, who is depicted in Puranānūru as a philanthropic ruler holding sway over the regions covered by the Podyilmalai or Agastyar mountain with Āyikudy as his Capital.⁹ It will be seen later on that Āyikkudy was none other than the town of Kottar in South Travancore. Andiran possessed the name Āy,¹⁰ which fact may



ĀHĀDAKANALAI IN NANJIL MOUNTAIN AND PADDY FIELDS AT ITS FOOT.

be taken to prove that the word Āy used in Sangam works does not mean a 'tribe.' He had the surname of Mā-vēl,¹¹ which perhaps corresponds to the Sanskrit title Mahā-sāmanta. According to Nachinar-kiniyar, Vēl was a title earned by subordinate chiefs from crowned Kings for acts of military valour.¹² Podyil malai, of which Andiran was the lord, was also the chief mountain of the Pandya Kings of the time. We may infer from these that Āy Andiran was a subordinate Prince ruling under the suzerainty of the Pandyas. Andiran was a contemporary of

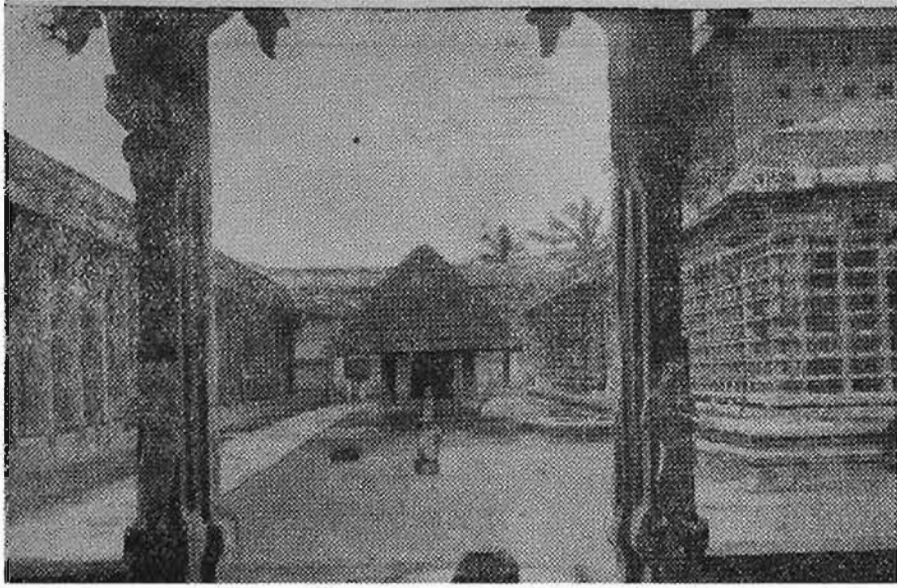
11. Purananuru. V. 185.

12. Tolkapyam. Porul. Athathinai—Sut. 30. See also Muhāmahopādhyāya Swaminatha Iyer's Puranānūru. Introduction p. 49. In the Tenkasi Gopuram inscriptions, the Pandya King Nelvelimāran Kulasekhara is called Vira-vel, and his son Ativirarama Srivallabha, Alagan Sivala-Vel. T. A. S. Vol. I. pp. 104-105. They were under the suzerain lord, the emperor of Vijayanagara.

8. K. G. Sesha Iyer. Cera kings of the Sangam period. pp. 1-2.

9. Puranānūru. V. 132.

10. Mahāmahopādhyāya Swaminatha Iyer. Purananuru (1935) Introduction. p. 49.



A SIDE VIEW OF THE ADIKESAVA TEMPLE AT TIRUVATTAR, THE CAPITAL CITY OF KING ELINI-ATAN.

the Chera King Antuvan-chēral-irumporai. The latter ruled at Tondi between A. D. 100 and 120.¹³ The poet Mudamōsiar of Enichēry in Urayūr, who was honoured by this Chera, praises the munificence of Āy Andiran.¹⁴ The period of Andiran's sway may, from these facts, be assigned to the first quarter of the second century A. D.

Nanjil Valluvan

Nānjil Valluvan who figures as a feudal lord in Puranānūru, is described by the poet Eḷanāganār as the chief of the Nānjil hills and a friend of the Cheras, to whom he paid homage. From the fact that the paddy fields in the Nānjil valley find prominent mention in

13. K. G. Sessa Aiyar. Cera kings of the Sangam period. p. 128.

14. Mahānabopādhyāya Swaminatha Iyer - Puranānuru (1935). Introduction p. 7.

15. Puranānuru. V. 139.

the passages describing his munificence, we may conclude that he exercised control over a portion of the present taluk of Tovala in South Travancore.¹⁵ The Poetess Avvai, who sings about him pays her respects to the Chera, Chola and Pandya Kings of the time, and praises them also. Chēramān-māri-venko, the

Chera hero of her lyrics, ruled over Vanji between A. D. 255 and 280.¹⁶ We may conclude from this that the date of Nānjil Valluvan was some time about the latter half of the 3rd century A. D.

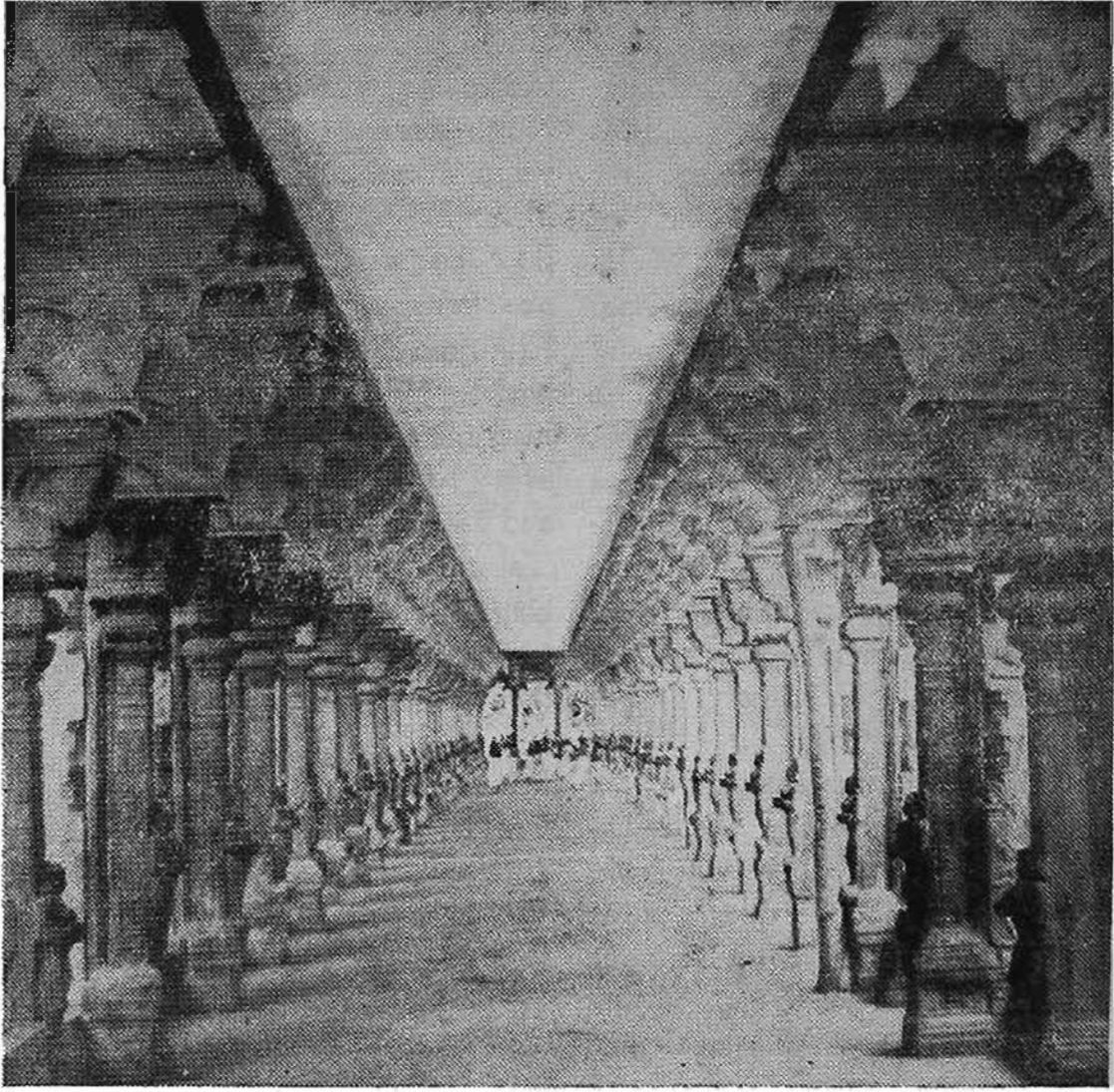
Elini Atan, a Chera Prince

The next and most important name from the point of view of Travancore is Vāttattu-Eḷini-ātan or Eḷini-ātan of Vāttāru.¹⁷ Vāttāru was the name by which the present town of Tiruvattar in the Kalkulam taluk of South Travancore was known in ancient days.¹⁸ Vāttattu-Eḷini-ātan figures in Puranānūru as a charitable ruler holding sway over a tract of country round Tiruvattar. All that we know of him is derived from a single verse composed in his honour by

16. K. G. Sessa Aiyar. Cera kings of the Sangam period. p. 128.

17. Puranānuru. V. 396.

18. T. A. S. Vol. I. pp. 175-296. Ibid. Vol. VII. pp. 116-118.



MAGNIFICENT PILLARED CORRIDOR IN TIRUVATTAR TEMPLE.

the poet Māmkudi-kiḷar. Though there is nothing specific in this verse to show that he is of Chera origin, his name indicates his connection with the Chera dynasty of Kings. Both the terms Ātan and Eḷini in the name Eḷini-ātan are Chera names. The Sangam collection, *Patittu-pathu*, mentions, among those of other Chera kings, the names of *Imaya-varamban-nedum chēral-ātan*, *Ādukōl-pātu-chēral-ātan*, *Selva-kadum-ko-vāḷi-ātan*, etc., which end in the epithet 'ātan.'¹⁹

19. *Patittu-pathu*. decads. 2, 6 & 7.

The term Eḷini is also a Chera name, found attached to the names of the Kings of the Adiyamān branch of Cheras, who were ruling over Takadūr. Adigamān-nedumān-anchi, the most powerful of the Takadūr Kings of the Sangam period, had the name of Eḷini. His son was Pokuttu-eḷini.²⁰ The Sangam poetess

20. Mahamahopadhyaya Swaminatha Aiyar. *Purananuru* (1935) Introduction under Adiyamān-neduman-anchi and Pokuttu-eḷini. pp. 47, 48 & 65.

Avvai celebrates in her poems Adigamān-nedumān-anchi and his son Pokuttu-ēḷini, and says that they were blood relations of the Chera Kings,²¹ ruling over the mother kingdom. Eḷini-ātan of Tiruvattar was in all probability a member of another branch of Chera Kings who ruled over a small territory round Tiruvattar. That there ruled in those days other Kings also in Travancore, who bore Chera names, is evident from certain circumstantial factors. There are two old villages in South Travancore the names of which are reminiscent of the names of the Chera Kings of the Sangam period. In the inscriptions of the Venkatachalapaty temple at Azhakiapandiapuram in the Tovala taluk of South Travancore the village of Azhakiapandiapuram is said to have possessed the name of Adiyanūr.²² One of the villages in the Neyyattinkara taluk even now bears the name Adiganūr. The terms Adiyan, Adigan, Adiyamān, Adigamān and Adigaimān are but variants of one and the same Chera name.²³ It is likely that the above villages were founded by Kings, who had the name of Adiyan or Adigan and that these kings were also members of the family in which Eḷini Ātan of Tiruvattar was born. In one of the bilingual inscriptions en-

graved on the door-way of a Jaina cave temple at Tirumalai near Polur in the North Arcot district, recording the renovation of the images of a Yaksha and Yakshini by king Adigamān of Takadūr, their original consecrator is said to be one "Vanchiar-Kulapathy-Eḷini," that is, Eḷini, the chief of the dynasty of Vanchi kings. In the Sanskrit portion of that inscription, the same Eḷini is described as a "Kērala-bhu-bhrit" or Kērala King and as a remote ancestor of Adigamān.²⁴ Takadur in the Salem district,²⁵ where kings of the name of Eḷini had ruled, was certainly not within Kerala,²⁶ and the reference cannot be applied to a king of that dynasty. None of the kings belonging to the main branch of the Cheras, ruling over the mother kingdom at Vanji has hitherto been known to have had the name of Eḷini. The reference in the inscription to a Kerala

24. S. I. I. Vol. I. No. 75—p. 106.

25. Some scholars identify this with Takadur in Mysore.

26. In the early stages of archaeological work in South India a notion gained ground among a section of scholars that Kerala included within its bounds not only the regions to the west of the Sahyadri mountains but also the southern portion of Mysore and the present Salem and Coimbatore districts. That this view was not supported by evidence has since been shown by many eminent authorities both European and Indian. In the first place, if the Kerala or Chera country had included in it South Mysore and the districts of Salem and Coimbatore, there would have arisen no necessity for the Chera kings of the Sangam period to wage war against the Adiyaman line of

21. Purananuru. V. 390.

22. Gopinatha Rao. T. S. A. Vol. IV. pp. 57. 58.

T. S. A. Vol. VII. p. 29.

23. Mahamahopadhyaya Swaminatha Aiyar, Purananuru (1935) p. 637. Foot-note.

king described as Vanchiyar-kulapathy-
Elini can justifiably be applied to a ruler
of Thiruvattar, which formed part of the
Kerala country and at the same time
possessed an Elini King. That there is

kings ruling at Takadur (whether it was in South Mysore or Salem district) and conquer their territory. But we see from the Sangam literature that Perum-cherai-Irumporai, as a matter of fact, fought against Adiyaman-elinu of Takadur and over-ran his country. (Patittu-pathu, 78. VII Patigam. Puram V. 230) Furthermore, there is evidence to show that about the 3rd century A. D., the southern parts of Mysore were under the western Gangas, as the region covered by the present Salem and Coimbatore districts was under the Kongu kings. Lewis Rice says, "The Ganga kingdom may be described generally as having extended over all the region drained by the Kaveri and tributaries, with the exception of the delta of Tanjore; that is to say over the south of Mysore and Coorg, with Salem, Coimbatore, the Nilgiri and parts of Malabar. Their territory in Mysore was called Ganga-vadi Ninety-six thousand, as containing, perhaps, 96 Nads, while their territory in Coimbatore and Salem was called Kongu-desa. Down to the middle of the 3rd century their Capital was at Skandapura which Lassen has placed at Gajalhatti. It was then removed to Talakkad on the Kaveri". (Rice's Mysore inscriptions, Nos. 151-157 and pp. 70, 222 and 262) Again speaking of the conditions that prevailed in the 8th century of the Christian era, H. Krishna Sastri observes in his masterly treatment of the Velvikkudy grant that "from what is stated of the countries of Kongu and Kerala on these inscriptions of Nedum Jatayan, it is not difficult to see that

nothing improbable in a king of Travancore, offering images to a temple in Arcot is seen from the fact that in those early days intercourse between the northern Tamil districts and Travancore

the former was bounded on the east and perhaps also on the north by the land of the Gangas—the Gangavadi 96,000 of the western Gangas of Talakkad and that on the south it extended far beyond Kodumudi, as even to cover the northern portion of the later Rajasaryavalanadu of the Cholas which included in it the present Musiri and the Trichinopoly taluks. Coimbatore was in the western division of the Kongu-mandalam. The king of the Northern (Vada) Kongu was Adiyaman the Adigaiman or Adiyaman of later inscriptions whose Capital was at Dharmapuri, the ancient Tagadur, in the Salem district. The Kerala country was situated on the west coast beyond the Sahyadri mountains and may have included also the southernmost portions of the present Coimbatore district". (Epigraphia Indica. Vol. XVII. p. 296) We thus see that Tagadur or the country of the Adigaiman line of kings never formed a permanent part of Kerala and that it never had the name Kerala or Chera country. In Asoka's Rock edict II, the territories of Keralaputra and Satya-putra are separately mentioned. Criticising the view of Mr. Govind Pai, K. G. Sesha Aiyar, in "Cera kings of the Sangam period", identifies Satiya-putra of Asoka with the Adigaiman kings. (Cera kings of the Sangam period pp. 18-19) If this identification is correct, we can aver that even in the days of Asoka (B. C. 250), the territory of the Adigaimans was a separate political unit, having no relation to the Kerala or Chera country.

was of an intimate character. The inscriptions on the pedestal of the Jaina images sculptured on the sacred rock of Tirucharanathu Malai in Chithral, an old Jaina settlement, in South Travancore, show that some of those images were the presents of devotees, who belonged to Tirunarungondai in the Tirukoilur taluk of South Arcot, Kudavāsai in the Tanjore district, and other distant places.²⁷ Some of the celebrated Jaina monks who made settlements in the mountains of the Madura district went from Kurandi, one of the villages in the Agastiswaram taluk of South Travancore.²⁸ The epigraphs engraved on the bases of the images found in the Kalugumalai hill of the Tinnevely District attest the fact that those images were the offerings of devotees, who belonged to Chitral and Kurandi.²⁹ It may be remembered here that it was the Kings of Venad or Travancore who were described in medieval Tamil literature and in later inscriptions variously as Vanchiyar-kōn,³⁰ Chēralar-kōn,³¹ Vanchi-kuladhipa,³² Vanchi-bhūpāla,³³ Vanchipāla-kulasēkhara, Kerala-bhūpāla,³⁴ etc., and Travancore is even to-day known as Vanchi-dēsa.

27. T. A. S. Vol. I. pp. 193-195.

T. A. S. Vol. II. p. 125.

28. T. A. S. Vol. IV. Part II. p. 146.

29. Ibid.

30. வாணுடையான் முடிமேல்வளையேற்
றியும் வஞ்சியர்தம்
கோணுடை யாப்படை கோட்டா
ற்றழிவித்தும் கொண்ட வன்றி
தாணுடையான் தென்னன்சத்து
ருதுர்ந்தான் பொன்வரைமேல்
யீணுடையான் கொல்லிவேங்காய்
நினக்குவிடை யில்லையே.
Erayanar Agaporul. Ills. Stanza 156.

What is the date of Elini-ātan? Māmkudi-kilār who honours this Prince also praises the valour of the Pandya King Talaiyalam-kānathu-nedum-Jelijan, a contemporary of Pālai-pādiya-perum-kodumco, who ruled over the Chera kingdom between A. D. 230 and 255.³⁵ From this synchronism we may infer that Elini-ātan lived some time about the first half of the third century A. D. Elini-ātan was ruling over Tiruvattar more or less during the same period in which Nānjil Valluvan held sway over the Nānjil hills. The Sangam literature is silent as to whether at this period any chief of the Āy Dynasty, about whom mention was made earlier was ruling over any part of Travancore. In the absence of information about them we are not justified in assuming that the Āy kings had disappeared from Travancore as we find from certain inscriptions of the 9th century A. D. that Karunadan, Adakkan and Vikramādityavaragunan, who are supposed to have descended from the Āy dynasty, had still hold in Venad.³⁶

(To be continued)

31. வாமாநெடும்தேர் வயமன்னர்வாண்
முனையார்
தேமாநறும் கண்ணியாரம் சென்று
தோன்றும் கொல்சேமளர்தம்
கோமரன்கடற்படை கோட்டாற்
றழியகணையுதைத்த
வேமான்சிலையவன் கன்னிநன்னீர்
கொண்டவீர் முகிலே.

Ibid 249.

32. Balarama Bharatam T. A. S. Vol. IV. Part I. P. 107 (Foot-note No. 5).

33. Tirukkanamkudi bell inscription. Ind-Ant. Vol. II. p. 360, T. A. S. Vol. VIII. p. 23.

34. T. A. S. Vol. VIII. p. 33.

35. K. G. Sessa Aiyar. Chera kings of the Sangam period. p. 128.

36. T. A. S. Vol. I. Part I. p. 3.