

The Titles of Vanniya Kulakshatriyas – A Study

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Abstract

The Vanniyaars are basically considered to be the people belonging to the community of the ruling class of great Indian sub-continent for many centuries. Most Vanniyaars in India are in the three adjacent southern states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, mostly concentrated in the area where these three states intersect. The term Vanniyaars (Vanniyaans) and Padayatchi has been used interchangeably because of the same historical origin they claim. Among the castes in the Tamil Nadu, Vanniyaars or Padayatchis are very popular and they are one of the very earliest caste to be socially well organized. Today they are the most politically mobilized and well-informed caste in Tamil Nadu. Many Vanniyaars migrated to South Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, Seychelles, Mauritius and Fiji and the next generation Vanniyaars have been using variant titles such as Goundar, Naicker and Padayatchi amongst themselves.

Keywords: Goundar, Palli, Padayachi, Vanniyaar, Vellalas

1. Introduction

The word Vanni in Sanskrit means fire and from one of the legends of Vanniyaars it is mentioned that Lord Shiva accepted the prayer and Yagna of the Sambu Muniver and after that the Vanniyaars were born. They were created by Lord Siva. They were born of the very powerful third eye of Lord Shiva to eliminate the two monsters Vathabi and Anathabi. A reference of the Vanniyaar history can also be found in the song of the great Tamil anthology of four hundred songs on war and wisdom in classical Tamil literature popularly known as Purananuru¹. It is mentioned in Purananuru that after the death of the Tamil Velir king 'Pari' who was one of the lost seven great patrons of arts and literature during that Sangam age his two daughters Angavai, Sangavai were taken to the king Irungovel by the poet Kabilar. He urged Irungovel to marry the daughters of Pari and also reminded him that he was born as an answer of lord Shiva to the prayer done and Yagna offered by the Saint Vadapal Muniver².

With the help of citations made in Vishnu Puranasaram and Deiviga Ula pointed out that Vadapal is the other name of SambuMuniver of Vanniyaar community. By studying and

analyzing the 2000 year old history of the Vanniyaar race it can be noted that the people belonging to this race have been living in Tamil Nadu as Vanniyaar Kula Kshatriyar, in Andhra as Agni Kula Kshatriyar and in Karnataka as Sambukula Kshatriyar³.

Nayagar, Nayakkar, Gounder, Reddy and Padayatchi are some of the common titles by which the Vanniyaars are identified in the southern part of India. In a village near Gingee Vanniyaars are identified as Mudaliyar. It is important to mention here that in the unified south Arcot and Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu the Vanniyaars are called as the Cheranars, the Cholanars, pandiyar and the AnjathaSingam and many hundreds of such names⁴.

Cherananar, Cholanar, Pandiyar, Varma, Udayar, Nayanar, Gounder, Samandar, Pallavar, Anjatha Singam, Kangana Udayar, Mazhuvar, Porayar, Arasapalli, Rayar, Padayatchiyar, Nayagar, Valandayar, Veeramindar, Vallamai Uadaiyar, Rajali, Thanthriyar, Reddigal, Duraigal, Pandarathar, Booppati, Paramesvaranar, Kalingarayar, Samburayar, Kachirayar and the Pallavarayar were the names given to Vanniya Kula Kshatriyas⁵.

As per the rule of the Smriti law it is mandatory on part of the Kshatriyar to add the surname, "Varma" with

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their first names, “Varma” means the “brave”. Similarly, the Brahmins are required to include the word, ‘sharma’ as their title. The “Vaishyas” have to include the word ‘Gupta’ or ‘Boothi’ or their title name and the “Sudras” have to include the word ‘Dasan’ as their title name⁶. Further, it is also mentioned in Smirti Purana just as the Udayars are considered to be the lords of the lands, the “Nayanars” and the “Nayagars” are considered to be the Lords of the world.

2. The Title Names used by the People of Various Communities in Tamil Nadu

- The title ‘Nayanar’ is used by the ThiruValluvan which is one of the sub caste of Panchamar community
- The title ‘Padayatchi’ is used by the Sembadavars of Neithal landscape (the fishermans of coastal areas)

The titles by which the vanniyaars are identified in some places of Tamil Nadu are as follows.

In and around Salem and Coimbatore belt the Vanniyar are identified as Kandar and Padayatchi.

- In and around Madurai and Tanjore belt the Vanniyar are identified as Padayatchi, Paruvur, Kachirayar, Oothangalsamasthamaanam; ParameshwaraVanniyar.
- In Aranthangi Vanangamudiyur actually denote the Vanniyar community.
- In Kumbakonam the title Kavalar, Thondaimannar are used by the people belonging to Vanniyar community.
- In Mayuram the title AnjathaSingam is used by the vanniyaar.
- In Samimalai the title Veeramindar is used by vanniyaar
- In Vaitheeswarankovil the title Rayaravuthraminder denotes Vanniyar community⁷.

In spite of having and resign titles for themselves within Vanniyar community the Vanniyaars practice a give and take policy without any discrimination within their community. The chairman of the welfare board (1970) for the backward class, Mr. Sattanathan pointed out in this the Vanniyar community is the only community without any discrimination within their community⁸.

Many titles are used by the Vanniyar community. Let us specifically analyse in detail facts related to each name.

3. Gounder Community

The word Goundar is used commonly by the Tamils and Kannadiyer. It is further mentioned that the titles such as

Konguvellalar, Anuppan, Kappilian, Palli, Sembadavan, Oorali and Vettuvan also denote the Gounder community⁹.

Some of the commonly used name in the infantry to denote the ranking of the soldiers, generals and officers became caste over a period of time. They are listed below.

- Samandhan.
- Samundan.
- Kamundan.
- Goundan and
- Kamindan.

Maasamathan is the title name given to the commander in chief of a very big army. His immediate sub ordinate in rank was giving the title of samandhan. This title became Kamundan during the rule of the Cholas. In the long run the word Kamundan became Goundar and eventually many generations came to be recognised as Padayachi.

The word “Govundigai” denotes the power and the authority of ruling a small region and if the same word or title name is analysed further it can be understood very clearly that the title name, “Goundar” actually refers the leader of a small region or the commander of an army. The word “Gounditchi” actually means wife of the president or a ruler of a small region.

This word has been used since 10 A.D and it actually denotes people belonging to a particular community and inevitable changes that led happened over a period of time within that community resulting in change in its meaning¹⁰.

4. Thousand Year Old Lake

Dasa Samudiram Lake is located in the Omalur to Dharmapuri highway. This lake was built in 996 BC during the rule of Rajarajan the Great. A stone engraving in that lake clearly states that the lake was built by Kachipalli Kamindar Pongilan Amandhan Kali who was a Vanniyar himself. His brother too assisted him in constructing the lake. But his name was defaced from the stone carving later. It is very exact words found in that stone carving. The last line actually that he would prostrate or bow down in humility at anyone who protects the lake¹¹.

Recently one thousand anniversary of this lake was celebrated by the people and the Public Works Department. Prof. Kodumudi Shanmugan points out that the people belonging to the Vanniyar community did serve the public by constructing this lake providing irrigation to 130 acres of land even today.

5. Hero Stones

Another stone carving found in Dharmapuri which carries the name of the son of Pulaya Kamundan, Vasava

Kamundan in it, Stone carvings found in Krishnagiri also pointed out that the word Goundar has denoted the Vanniyar community for a very long time¹². Even during 1113 A.D the Vannaiyar as Nattu Koundans and Oor Mudaliyars lived a commanding life between 11th Century BC and 18th century. A lot of proofs related to this can be found. It is very clear that the word Goundar is the modified title name of Kamundan in fifteenth century itself.

Majority of the landlords and the agriculturalists in Dharamapuri and Krishnagiri were Vanniyar Goundars only and not VellalarGoundars. 90% of the donations made for temples came from the community of Vanniyar Goundars only. The Goundars denoting Vanniyars occupied almost all the powerful positions in society and also in the administration of those regions comes as no surprise today, states Prof. Santhalingam¹³.

6. Engravings on Copper Plates Royal Grants

In addition to innumerable proof that the title Goundar was used by the people belonging to Vanniyar community, there were many engravings on copper plates available supporting the same idea found in 1595 A.D, which carries plenty of name belonging to the Vanniya Goundar community^{14,15}.

Engravings on copper plates found in Neyveli also carry plenty of names of people belonging to Vanniyar Gounder community¹⁶. A stone carving is found at an ancient A Ranganathar temple in Singavaram. The name of above mentioned Vanni king can be found. The name of his descendants can also be found in that stone carving, the stone carving states that Mannapa Kounder was the ninth generation of his family and worked as a courier to the king Desingu Raja. Around 1800 A.D it can be seen that most the books carried the title name Vanniyar with the word "Goundar" from the book "Chandrmbal Nadagam" written by Velayudha Goundar and released in 1945. He mentioned his name as Vanniya Kulam, Vaiyapuri Gounder son Vellayutha Goundar from Nedumudaiyan village, Tirukkovalur taluk. It can be understood without any doubt and a lot of a proof the Vanniyar carried the title name "Goundar" with them for many centuries. In the official list of most backward classes released by the Government of Tamil Nadu serial No. 166 clearly states that the title name "Goundar" is exclusively reserved for the Vanniyar community only¹⁷.

- VellalaGoundar.
- NattuGounder and
- NarambukattiGoundar.

The title name "Goundar" is not used separately anywhere. So it can be understood that the title name of "Goundar" used separately denotes only the Vanniyar community. According to Prof. Rajavelu of Konguvelalar community the people belonging to the community of Konguvelalar have stated to use the title name "Goundar" only in the reason past¹⁸.

As per the laws of the Smiriti the meaning of the titles are given below:

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| Udayar | - Owner of the World. |
| Nayanar | - God of the World. |
| Gandar | The Killer of Enemies |
| Samandar | - The Commander or Leader of The Army |
| Pallavar | - The Desendants of Pallava Kings Belonging to Bharathwas Community |
| Porayar | - The Title Name or Nickname of Cheras |
| Palli | - King in Malayalam it Comes From the Root Word, 'Bala' in Sanskrit The Word Palli also Means Sanjour of the World. The Malayalam Words Such as Pallivasal, Palliveedu, Pallivettai, Pallival Etc. Are a Proof of it |
| The Rayar | - Kings |
| The Padayatchi | - Commanders of the Army or Someone Related to the Members of the Army |
| The Valandayar | - People Who Always Carry Swords with them |
| The Thanthriyar | - Experts of Minister Profession. |
| The Boopathi | - President/Leader of The World |
| The Pandarathar | - Terasurere. |
| The Durai | - Most Noble or Highly Respectable Person in Society. |
| The Samburayar | - King of Chola Dynasty. |
| The Paramesvaranar | - The Supreme Lord of the World. |
| The Veermindar | - People of Valour and Power ¹⁹ . |

Each of the title names mentioned above denotes the ruling class.

7. Summation

In various parts of Tamil Nadu the title given to Vanniyar Community is different in each areas or district. It can be concluded that the Vanniyar community is eligible to use the title name Goundar, as there are historical proof in the form of literature, sacred writings, legends, and stone carvings, and copper plates to support their claims. It is no exaggeration that Vanniyar have rightfully and historically used a title name “Goundar” for many centuries.

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