

Erivirapaṭṭinam, Warriors and the State in Medieval South India*

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The study of corporate bodies of various sorts has taken a significant place in the historiography of medieval south India. Among these corporate bodies, the Ayyāvoḷe Five Hundred (*Ayyāvoḷe ainūruvar* in Kannada and *Aiyappolil ainūruvar* in Tamil), supposed to be a guild of itinerant merchants¹ met with all over south India, has been studied by several scholars as an economic and social institution. There are still some crucial gaps in our knowledge pertaining to this and the related bodies, partly due to the fragmentary nature of the available data and partly due to insufficient comparative study of the evidence spread over different linguistic zones. A recent comprehensive review of the evidence relating to the Ayyāvoḷe Five Hundred, hereafter Ayyāvoḷe-500, has helped in sharply focussing on certain aspects that had not been paid sufficient attention in earlier studies and also in revising some prevalent conceptions.² In this paper a special category of commercial towns called *erivira-paṭṭinam* (also called *vīra-paṭṭinam*, *vīra-taḷam*, and *erivira-taḷam*)³ is reconsidered in the light of the cumulative evidence presently available and attention is drawn to the implications for the larger understanding of the society and polity of the period.

The term *erivira-paṭṭinam*⁴ has been interpreted differently by different scholars. K.R. Venkatarama Ayyar who was the first scholar to study the Ayyāvoḷe trade guild in some detail took it as a fortified mart.⁵ It is Indrapala who advanced further the understanding of this term on the basis of some Sri Lankan evidence.⁶ He said that it was a market town protected by the *erivīrar*, the “warriors who throw (javelins)”. Kenneth R. Hall took it as a place where

* The strict transliteration system used in this Felicitation Volume (which follows the conventions used in the Tamil Lexicon) has been, in the case of this contribution, checked against the spellings in the 2 vol. Glossary of Tamil Inscriptions (*Tamiḷ Kalvēṭṭu Collakarāṭi*) edited by Professor Y. Subbarayalu and published by the Santi Sadhana Trust (Chennai, 2002 & 2003). However, the delay having being very short for proofreading, due to various constraints, I apologize for any typographical error that might remain (Editor).

¹ The designation “guild” is used as a convenient label only, as the body does not fit the proper definition of a guild. See below.

² Noboru Karashima, ed. *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities in the Indian Ocean: Testimony of Inscriptions and Ceramic-sherds*, Taisho University, Tokyo, 2002.

³ That all these are variants of one and the same designation is clear from their usage in similar contexts in different inscriptions. Sometimes more than one variant are found in the same inscription.

⁴ Also spelt as *-paṭṭanam* and *-paṭṭanam*.

⁵ K.R. Venkatarama Ayyar, “Medieval Trade, Craft and Merchant Guilds in South India”, *Journal of Indian History*, 25, part 1 (1947), pp. 269--80.

⁶ K.Indrapala, “South Indian Mercantile Communities in Ceylon, circa 950--1250”, *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, (n.s.), vol.1, no.2 (1971), pp. 101--13.

“the heroes of the road” conducted trade.⁷ According to him the *erivira-paṭṭinam* had a stance between the *nakaram* which was primarily centre for the exchange of goods of local origin and were periodically involved in the exchange of foreign commodities, and the *paṭṭinam* of the coast, dealing with the exchange of foreign merchandise, a position which allowed the *erivira-paṭṭinam* to participate in both realms of commercial exchange. Hall also thought that the *erivira-paṭṭinams* were located in turbulent frontier areas where there was need for markets, but where royal authority provided little or no protection. Meera Abraham who took it as a protected trading base also suggested that its constitution had the sanction of royal charters.⁸ R. Champakalakshmi concurs with this view and does not agree with Hall's suggestion that they were only located in frontier areas.⁹ She would rather take them as centres on trade routes used as warehouses by itinerant merchants.

It may be seen from the foregoing information that there is unanimity of opinion about the *erivira-paṭṭinam* being a protected commercial settlement. But there is no unanimity regarding the locale of the *erivira-paṭṭinam*, the way it was created, and its relation to the king. A common difficulty that has to be faced in tackling these problems is paucity of reliable epigraphic records. Even the few relevant inscriptions have not been properly published with texts. Now, luckily, there is some fresh evidence both from Sri Lanka and south India (See Appendix).¹⁰ A few significant inscriptions have been added to the list during the past three decades. The Sri Lankan inscriptions, though they had been published three decades ago,¹¹ could not be used until recently due to their unsatisfactory texts. The fresh copies made recently for them give an entirely new picture.¹²

Most of the *erivira-paṭṭinam* inscriptions fall within a time range of a century and a half, the earliest belonging to c.1050. A comparative study of all these brings out a striking similarity among them, though they are concerned each with some local transaction belonging to different years. A detailed analysis of a few typical inscriptions will illustrate this point. The inscription at Camuttirāpaṭṭi¹³ records that a big assembly called *alakiya-pāṇṭiya-peruniravi*

⁷ Kenneth R. Hall, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Colas*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1980, pp. 143, 188. Hall's translation of *eri* as road, however, has no lexical authority.

⁸ Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of south India*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 111–12.

⁹ R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization: South India 300 BC to AD 1300*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 52, 219, 318.

¹⁰ Fourteen inscriptions are listed here with summaries. A few more inscriptions which simply mention the name of *erivira-paṭṭinam* have been omitted from the list.

¹¹ A. Velupillai, ed., *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, vols. I and II, Peradeniya, 1971–72.

¹² These were copied during fieldworks undertaken in 1997 and 1998 as part of an International project organized by Prof. Noboru Karashima to study Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities in the Indian Ocean under the sponsorship of Taisho University, Tokyo. The newly made texts are published in the report on the project (see note 2 above) and *Avanam* (Journal of the Tamil Nadu Archaeological Society), 9 (1998), pp. 32–39.

¹³ References to this and other inscriptions quoted below are given in the Appendix.

which comprised the Five Hundred of the *18-bhūmi* and *nānātēci*, and the Five Hundred of the town called *Paniyānāṭu* and a subordinate group (called *nammakkaḷ*, “our boys/sons”) comprising the *nāṭṭu-ceṭṭis*, *taḷaceṭṭis*, and other “servants” (*paṇicai-makkaḷ*), decided to make the town as *eṇivīra-paṭṭaṇam*, also called *vīrataḷam*. This was done to honour a warrior who saved several of his fellow warriors after fighting and killing the enemies of the *vaḷaṅciyas*. They also decided to enhance the fees and the cloth-money (*vīra-pāvāṭai*) that the hero was getting in the town. In the concluding part, only the *nāṭṭu-ceṭṭis* and the “servants” put their signature to the transaction; that means, it is they who were the actual people doing the transaction. In this transaction two major groups were involved: (1) the body called “Five Hundred” (i.e., Ayyāvoḷe-500), (2) the body referred to as “our boys”, a term obviously used by the first group to address the second group. The first group was the body of merchants, which was very often referred to as the Five Hundred of the eighteen *bhūmi/ viṣayam* (“lands” or “countries”) and of *nānātēci* (“several countries”) to indicate its wide area of activity.

Ayyāvoḷe-500 is usually referred to as a guild or sometimes as a corporation of itinerant merchants. Careful studies of the inscriptions relating to this body by G.S. Dikshit and others suggest that it was not a single, unified guild or corporation for the entire south India, though inscriptions bearing almost identical eulogistic preamble are found throughout south India and Sri Lanka, written in Kannada, Tamil, and Telugu languages.¹⁴ It was rather a concept of an overarching merchant organization that took shape in the early 10th century, to bring together all possible specialist merchant groups, itinerant and sedentary, local and foreign, and form potential networks spread over several regions.¹⁵ This seems to have taken shape concomitant with the growth of big states, like the Chola in Tamil area and the Chalukya in Karnataka. The areas of such networks were actually confined to certain geographical zones, like southern/northern Karnataka, Pandya-Kongu, etc. Under these circumstances it is the local associates of these networks, transacting in different commercial centres (*nakaram*, *paṭṭiṇam*) who can be recognized as the chief figures of the concerned record. In most of the Ayyāvoḷe inscriptions this distinction can be made.¹⁶ In Camuttirāpaṭṭi inscription, the Five Hundred of the local town called *Paniyānāṭu* occupies a distinct position, whereas the Five Hundred of the *18-bhūmi* and *nānātēci* is mentioned in general terms.

The other group which is given the attribute *nammakkaḷ* comprised *nāṭṭu-ceṭṭi*, *taḷa-ceṭṭi* and *paṇicai-makkaḷ*. Actually it is this group who recorded the decision. This suggestion is supported by the names of signatories to the decision. Those signatories, numbering ten, are having the titles *nāṭṭu-ceṭṭi* and *taḷa-ceṭṭi*, *koṅkavāḷaiyan*, *āṇṭāṇ*, etc. as part of their names. This group was predominantly composed of warriors, or *eṇivīrar*, though they are not directly

¹⁴ For a discussion of this problem, see Meera Abraham, *op.cit.*, pp. 74–75; R. Champalakshmi, *op.cit.*, pp. 311–12.

¹⁵ Noboru Karashima, ed. *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities ...*, pp. 84–87.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 78–83.

mentioned as such in this inscription. The writer of this document, however, is called *Erivira-paṭai-ācāriyaṅ*. The attribute *erivira-paṭai* is obviously named after the army (*paṭai*) of *eri-vīrar*.

Some of the Sri Lankan inscriptions are more explicit about the nature and composition of *erivira-paṭṭiṇam*. An inscription at Viharehinna¹⁷ has the following information. The *18-bhūmi-vīrar* in appreciation of the timely help extended by the Greatmen (*perumakkaḷ*) of the town called *Mācēṅakāmam* *alias* *Taṅmacākara-paṭṭaṅam* in getting release of one of their “brethren” who had been put in chains by a local chief and also to show their gratitude to the Greatmen for honouring them by designating their town as *erivirantāṅam* after the warrior clan *kulam*,¹⁸ decided themselves to honour the Greatmen. For that they decided to give up their right to collect lamp oil and their right to collect money fees in that town. They would continue to get only the day meal and 4 *kācu* for dress (*pāvāṭai*) as per the existing custom. This they swore upon their chivalrous tradition (*vīrum cīrum āṭṭuttāvum*). This statement is followed by an imprecation warning that those who dared to obstruct the decision would receive severe corporal punishment and would be given a dog's burial.

The next inscription at Budumuttava gives similar information. The Greatmen of *Mākal* *alias* *Vikkiramacalāmēkapuram* honoured in several ways the warrior group called the *18-bhūmi-vīrakoṭi*: When some individual warriors were facing some hazardous situation on a highway, they were helped (perhaps by sending reinforcements) and protected in several ways; Further the Greatmen gave the epithet *vīra-mākāḷam* (in the name of the *vīrar*) to the temple of *Lōkamātā*, the mother of the *vaiśrāvāṅas* (i.e. the merchants). For all these good things, the *vīrakoṭi* gratefully decided to grant their lamp oil and the money dues that they had been enjoying in the town in favour of the deities *Paramēśvari* (*Durga*) and *Lōkapperuñceṭṭi* (the Buddha or a *Bōdhisatva*) of *Aññūruvaṅ-palli*. They swore upon their chivalrous tradition to protect the gift. Lastly it is mentioned that it is the stone of *vīrataḷam*. There are two more similar inscriptions in Sri Lanka, at *Detiyamulla* and *Galtenpitiya*. Though they are very much mutilated, the available lines show that they are similar to the above two records in their purport.

In all these Sri Lankan cases the Greatmen or *perumakkaḷ* of the respective town must be considered as the members of *nakaram*, the corporate body of the town. They may be considered as the local associates of *Ayyāvōḷe-500*. The Budumuttava inscription has a short eulogy of the Five Hundred and following this the *perumakkaḷ* are said to be the “sons” (*makkaḷ*) of *Paramēśvari* of *Aiyappolil*. This is the way the *Ayyāvōḷe-500* body is usually described in several records. The *perumakkaḷ* are later denoted as *vaiśrāvāṅar* of the *18-bhūmi*, which also would support the links.

The *Kāṭṭūr* inscription which had been quoted often in the studies on *erivira-paṭṭiṇam* is not much different from the above. According to this, the

¹⁷ For a detailed discussion of this inscription, see Y. Subbarayalu and Noboru Karashima, “A Trade Guild Inscription from Viharehinna, Sri Lanka”, *Ibid.*, pp. 27--35.

¹⁸ The text runs as “*nāmañcātti kulattiṅ pēriṭṭu peruñciṅappuc ceytamaiyil*”.

assembly of merchants (*nāṇātēci-peruniravi*) decided to convert Kāṭṭūr as *vīra-paṭṭīnam* (same as *erivīra-paṭṭīnam*). This body met at Mayilārppil (Mayilāppūr, now part of Chennai) while Kāṭṭūr was about 30 km north of this place. Ultimately the assembly of the guards or soldiers (*vīra-peruniravi*) is said to have endorsed the decision of the *camayam* (same as *nāṇātēci-peruniravi*).¹⁹ The decision stipulated that the *nammakkaḷ* should not collect any dues from the town and if they did so they should incur a fine, i.e., they should return twice what they collected. The stipulation is not so clear, as the background to the decision is not mentioned. One thing is, however, certain: sometimes the guards (*nammakkaḷ*) were exacting and behaved rudely when collecting their fees. Such unruly guards were warned of excommunication from the town.²⁰

From the foregoing records, it is clear that the *erivīra-paṭṭīnam* was just a new designation to an old town and the town itself was not newly created. The designation was given to the concerned town to mark an occasion -- to remember the brave deeds of some of their guards. Though the initiative for the conferment of the designation was taken by an assembly merchants in a few cases, as that of Kāṭṭūr, it was done generally by the guards (*vīrar*) themselves. It may be noted that the guards also acted as a corporate group or assembly, which was denoted always in plural by such variant names as *18-bhūmi-vīrar*, *18-bhūmi-vīrakoṭiyār*, *eri-vīrar*, or just *vīrar*.

The background information to the advent of each *erivīra-paṭṭīnam* is more important than the *erivīra-paṭṭīnam* itself for the social history. The guards who were honoured by conferment of *erivīra-paṭṭīnam* are said to have fought bravely with some enemies of the *valaṅciyar*. The term *valaṅciyar* denoted the premier constituent group of the Ayyāvoḷe-500. In several instances it was used as a synonym of the guild itself. The very fact that such acts of bravery were appreciated and recorded permanently would show that the merchant groups were mostly transacting in a hostile and unsafe atmosphere. Generally it may be the robbers who were creating the problem. Sometimes the trouble came from some local chiefs too. In the Viharehinna inscription a local chief called Vēṇāṭuṭaiyāṅ arrested a guard of the merchants. An inscription at Singaḷāntakapuram, Tiruchirappalli Dt., adds a supporting evidence. The inscription is not well preserved and therefore some crucial detail cannot be understood from the available text. As far as it can be made out, it is found that two big persons, Iruṅkōḷar and Maḡadai-nāṭālvāṅ,²¹ and their mercenary soldiers (*kūliccēvakar*) attacked and killed the merchant guards and that they were overcome by the efforts of a warrior group called Valaṅkai-uyyak-koṅṭārkaḷ, of Ciṅkaḷāntakapuram, which was an *erivīra-taḷam*.

¹⁹ The terms *camayam* and *peruniravi* are used synonymously to denote a big gathering or assembly.

²⁰ The Epigraphist in his short note on this inscription took the unruly people as the merchant classes themselves. *ARE*. (=Annual Report on Epigraphy), 1912--13, p. 100. This has been repeated in several works without verifying the text again. The qualifying term *nammakkaḷ* can apply only to the *vīrar* and not to the merchants.

²¹ These are actually some of the titles taken by officials and local leaders during the time of the Chola rule, Nōboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions, AD 850--1800*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 56--68.

A third inscription from Vēmbatti, Erode Dt, is very interesting. Actually it does not refer to any recent incident. But the names of some of the guards reflect clearly the various important encounters they had faced with the enemies. The following names may be cited: (1) Pīlaikkāṇḍali who cut Cuntiracōḷa-muttaraiyaṅ at Muciri *alias* Mummuṭicōḷapuram, (2) Eṟiyum-viṭaṅka-cetṭi, who cut the chief of Cūralūr in Toṅṭai-nāṭu, (3) Vīraḷmatalai, who cut Kōtai Cōlai, a captain belonging to the village Kākkai in Kallaka-nāṭu of Pāṅṭināṭu. These are not just local encounters as may be seen from the places relating to the different encounters. The place of the inscription is in Erode District, while Kākkai is in Ramnad Dt, Muciri is in Tiruchirappalli Dt, and Cūralūr is in Nellore Dt, at distances ranging between 100 and 300 kilometers from the place of the inscription. Similarly in Camuttirāpaṭṭi inscription an encounter is said to have taken place at Tirumayam situated at a distance of about 50 km from the findspot of the inscription. All these would suggest that the *vīrar* were accompanying the merchants wherever they went on the trade routes.

When the guards were not on the move they must have been stationed at the particular towns to which they belonged. In fact, their livelihood was dependent on that town. They were given some money dues and special allowances for cloth (*pāvāṭai*), and oil from each of the households of the merchants. Oil must have been meant for torches, very essential for guarding the towns during night time. The wording of the inscriptions suggests that there existed a close bond between the merchants and their guards. The merchants were always considerate towards their loyal servants, whom they referred to as “our boys” (*nammakkaḷ*) while the latter were very faithful to their masters, and referred to them as “our greatmen” (*nam perumakkaḷ*). The *vīrar* had developed a group consciousness and an ideal of chivalry, swerving from which was considered a sin. The ideal of chivalry is expressed by the phrases *vīramuṟaimai* (“the code of warriors”) and *vīrum cīrum āṭṭal* (“to practise the code of warriors”). Under these circumstances it is inappropriate to call the merchant warriors as just mercenaries of the merchant guild.

The names of individual warriors found in *erivīra-paṭṭinam* inscriptions generally reflect their closeness to merchant body. Those names include such attributes as *tēci*, *nāṅātēci*, *kavarai*, etc., for example, Tēci-piccaṅ, Nāṅātēci-āṅṭāṅ, Kavaṟaikaḷ-uyyakkōṅṭāṅ. The names were actually made of long string of titles emphasizing their martial quality. One striking thing about the names is that very similar names come from widely separated places between Mysore in the north and Sri Lanka in the south. That means, there was very good communication and exchange of ideas among these guards.

In all the available inscriptions relating to *erivīra-paṭṭinam*, the guards are found to be already part of the old towns. To put it otherwise, they were not settled newly in the concerned *erivīra-paṭṭinam*. A related question is whether all other towns had their own guards. This fact cannot be ascertained from the sparse evidence now available. It has to be stressed that all the known *erivīra-paṭṭinam* inscriptions are found in Tamil only. There are nearly 110 towns in the

area of Tamil inscriptions,²² including southern Karnataka and Sri Lanka, with links somehow or other to Ayyāvōḷe-500, and only about twenty of these towns are called *erivīra-paṭṭinam*, wherein the presence of guards is clearly attested to. For the rest of the towns, except a few, no direct evidence is forthcoming on this aspect. Most probably those towns also had the guards, as in the eulogies of the Ayyāvōḷe-500, wherever some big gathering is met for some common purpose, the guards are specifically mentioned as a constituent of the assembly.

Moreover there is another piece of evidence in the same eulogies. It is said therein that the members of Ayyāvōḷe-500 transacted their business in some 18 *paṭṭinam*, 32 *veḷāpuram*, and 64 *kaṭikai-tāvaḷam*. Obviously the numbers 18, 32, and 64 are conventional attributes to denote that the places were several in number. The order of the description of these places would suggest that there was a kind of hierarchy among them: *paṭṭinam* was the bigger town, either on the coast or in the interior, the *veḷāpuram* was the harbour place, and part of a bigger town.²³ *Kaṭikai-tāvaḷam* is a compound of *kaṭikai* and *tāvaḷam*. For *tāvaḷam* there is good lexical authority and local usage to say that it is a seasonal market or fair.²⁴ The term *ghaṭika-sthāna* is used as a Sanskrit equivalent of *kaṭigai-tāvaḷam*. It may be noted *sthāna*, which has the generic sense of place or location, does not convey the exact meaning of *tāvaḷam*. More so, the term *ghaṭika*, which in Sanskrit is associated with measure of time or pot.²⁵ This is therefore a case of bad Sanskritisation. Actually *kaṭigai* must be a Dravidian word, related to the Tamil root *kaṭi*, meaning protection.²⁶ That is, *kaṭikai-tāvaḷam* is a protected market or fair. This would imply the presence of some armed persons in those places. In Padaviya, Sri Lanka, a *kaṭikai-tāvaḷam* was part of an Aipolil-paṭṭinam. We cannot therefore assert that only *erivīra-paṭṭinams* were protected commercial settlements. They took their designation only due to some extraordinary situation, as noted above.

The suggestion of Champakalakshmi that these were centres on trade routes used as warehouses by itinerant merchants may be accepted, but there is no evidence to support her other suggestion that they were created by royal charters. In all the fourteen inscriptions discussed here, it is only the *vīrar* and occasionally the merchants who decided the designation. King's role is not hinted either directly or indirectly. Only three of these inscriptions are dated in a king's reign. Interestingly the record of the decision itself is called specifically as *vīrasāsana*, "charter of the *vīrar*", in two inscriptions, namely at Basinikonda and Padaviya.

²² For a list of the places and their inscriptions, see Karashima, ed., *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities ...*, pp. 297--307.

²³ In Barus inscription this fact is clearly supported. Y. Subbarayalu, "The Tamil Merchant-Guild Inscription at Barus, A Rediscovery", Claude Guillot, ed. *Histoire de Barus, Sumatra, Le Site de Lobu Tua I, Études et Documents, Cahiers d'Archipel* 30, 1998, Paris, pp. 25--33.; *Avanam*, 4 (1994), pp. 118--19.

²⁴ *Tamil Lexicon*, p. 1850--51.

²⁵ Sir Monier Williams, ed. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, reprint, 1981, p. 375.

²⁶ *Tamil Lexicon*, p. 667.

It may be recalled here that the eulogy of Ayyāvōḷe-500 always emphasizes in the beginning that the merchant body was adorned with or in possession of five hundred *vīrasāsana*. The obvious conclusion would be that the five hundred charters (whatever be the significance of the big number) are the charters of their own making, and not obtained from any king. This is not to say that the kings did not play any role in the creation of the commercial settlements. There are several instances of royal patronage, which can be verified from the new names of towns, which usually have the royal names plus the suffix *puram* or *paṭṭinam*, for example, Jayaṅkoṇṭacōḷa-puram, Kulōttunkacōḷa-paṭṭinam.²⁷

When it comes to the question of the armed guards of merchants *vis-à-vis* the king or the state, it is quite ambiguous. Several instances of the *erivīra-paṭṭinam* are found in the 11th century, i.e., when the Chola power was at its pinnacle. This curious phenomenon can be explained in two ways: (1) Even the great Chola kings (or for that matter, the Chalukya and Sri Lankan kings too) were not able to provide protection to the merchants on the trade routes, (2) The state did not care about such affairs generally, leaving the people to look after themselves. The second explanation is the more plausible one. The south Indian itinerant merchants certainly had a tradition of protecting themselves, right from the early 10th century. Coupled with this armed tradition, they had also maintained a studied neutrality as they were moving across a multitude of political regimes. Spencer has summed up this quality of merchants in a nice statement: "Far from being the 'creatures' of any particular dynastic regime, the itinerant merchants exercised a chameleon-like ability to adapt themselves to local regimes to suit their own convenience."²⁸ Karashima has also commented on the merchant body's non-commitment to any political power after analyzing the Tamil inscriptions of the Ayyāvōḷe-500 found in Southeast Asian countries.²⁹

The Ayyāvōḷe-500 inscriptions, particularly those relating to the *erivīra-paṭṭinam*, include the names of several groups of the warriors, like *aṅkakāṇṇar*, *koṅkavāl-700*, *paṅmai-300*, *ciṅkam*, *ciṅpuli*, *nāṭṭuc-ceṭṭi*, *valaṅkai*, *vēḷaikkāṇṇar* and so on.³⁰ All these together are denoted by the common designation *vīrar* or *vīrakoṭṭiyār* of *18-bhūmi*. The group *nāṭṭuc-ceṭṭi* may be mistaken for a group of *ceṭṭi* or merchants, but actually in the context they are found to be a prominent warrior group. *Koṅkavāl-700* and *paṅmai-300* are found from the early 10th century. Though *valaṅkai* figures rarely as a group name, it is found as an attribute in the names of several individual warriors. The name *vēḷaikkāṇṇar* occurs a few times. Of these, a few names like *koṅkavāl*, *valaṅkai*, and *vēḷaikkāṇṇar* are found among the names of regiments of the Chola army. While the latter generally have some royal titles as their prefixing attributes, like Parāntaka-

²⁷ Hall, *op.cit.*, pp. 219ff.

²⁸ George W. Spencer, *The Politics of Expansion: The Chola Conquest of Sri Lanka and Sri Vijaya*, New Era Publications, Madras, 1983, p. 57.

²⁹ Karashima, ed. *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities ...*, pp. 16--17.

³⁰ For a detailed list of these groups, see Karashima, ed. *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities ...*, pp. 76--78.

koṅkavālār, the merchant warriors do not have any association with king's titles. The general name *vīrakoṭiyār* occurring very often in Ayyāvōḷe-500 inscriptions is not found among the Chola regiments. Therefore the similar names of warriors, which are but a few, does not take us far. The names *valaṅkai* and *vēḷaikkāṟar* might have been adopted by the merchant warriors from the Chola army, while such names as *koṅkavāl*, "the swordsmen of Koṅku", may have been taken from a common source of recruitment. These names are found among the merchant warriors from the beginning.

Lastly, the evidence of the famous Polonnaruwa inscription³¹ of the *vēḷaikkāṟas* may be considered for the possible relation of the itinerant merchants and the royal army. In this inscription, which is dated sometime in the first half of the 12th century, the big army (*mahātantram*) of the *vēḷaikkāṟa* soldiers took a vow to protect faithfully the great Buddhist temple of Tooth-relic at Polonnaruwa, which had been entrusted to them by the Sri Lankan king. This solemn oath was taken in the presence of the *vaḷaṅciyar* and *nakarattār*, who are addressed respectively as our "elders" (*mūtātaikal*) and "associates" or "companions" (*kūṭivarum*) by the army people. The army is said to have included *valaṅkai*, *iṭaṅkai*, *cirutanam*, *piḷḷaikaḷtanam*, *vaṭukar*, *malaiyāḷar*, *parivārakkontam*, and *palakalanai*, most of which names are found earlier among the army units of the Cholas. On the basis of this inscription and on the fact that the Ayyāvōḷe-500 was associated with several groups of warriors, Indrapala suggested the possibility of the merchant community supplying mercenaries from south India to Sri Lankan kings during the 11th to 13th century.³² Hall makes an addition to this proposition that the merchant-controlled regiments would have even been loaned, or hired out, to the Chola king.³³

The available evidence is too little to support such speculations. Hall's suggestion of the Chola king hiring soldiers from the merchant bodies can easily be refuted. The warrior groups of Ayyāvōḷe-500 became conspicuous in the latter part of the 11th century, whereas evidence for the Chola army units (*kaikkōḷar* and *vēḷaikkāṟar*) are found right from the beginning of the 10th century. By early 11th century in the reign of Rājarāja I (985--1014) the army attained huge proportions by the medieval standards.³⁴ Therefore it is anachronistic to think that the merchant soldiers were hired out to the Chola king. The evidence of the Polonnaruwa inscription is, however, a bit intriguing, as it certainly suggests some close relations existing between the merchant communities and the *vēḷaikkāṟa* army. But there is no evidence in any Ayyāvōḷe-500 record in south India that the south Indian merchants transacted in "human" merchandise. It is possible that most of the *vēḷaikkāṟa* soldiers were the descendants of the Tamil soldiers of the Chola army who stayed back in Sri Lanka even after the Chola power had been withdrawn from the island country in the 11th century. Some must have recently migrated from the Pandya

³¹ Epigraphia Indica, xviii (1925--26), pp. 330--40.

³² Indrapala, *op.cit.*

³³ Hall, *op.cit.*, p. 192.

³⁴ *South Indian Inscriptions*, vol. I, Introduction.

country, which was always friendly with the Sri Lankan kings. And some may have been originally merchant soldiers too. Most probably, they all being Tamils ethnically, they wanted to have the Tamil merchant elite of Polonnaruwa as witnesses to the solemn occasion associated with the Buddhist temple. And the Ayyāvoḷe merchants themselves were ardent patrons of Buddhist institutions in Sri Lanka as elsewhere.³⁵

Appendix

Summaries of Eṛivīrapaṭṭinam Inscriptions³⁶

1) Camuttirāpaṭṭi, Madurai (Dindukkal) District. On a standing stone slab (now removed to Tirumalainayak Mahal Museum, Madurai). *Avanam*, 2, pp. 6--8. Chola-pandya king Vikrama, AD 1050.

[Summary given in the body of the article]

2) Basinikoṇḍa, Madanapalle Tk, Chittoor, District. *ARE*, 1912, 342. Chola king Rajadhiraja I, AD 1050.

First the king's eulogy is given in brief. Then it is mentioned that the village Cīruvaḷli was converted into an *eṛivīra-paṭṭinam* (with the attribute *nāṇātēci dasamaḍi*) by a big merchant assembly (*camayam*) called *Aññūruva-peruniravi* comprising the *nāṭu*, *nakara*, and *nāṇātēci* along with several warrior groups serving the *camayam* (*camaiyattu tiruwaṭṭikku pañiceyyum*). It seems that the warriors were the actual executors of the record and the record itself is called *vīraśāsana*. They relinquished something (not clear due to damage to the last portion of the inscription) which they had been collecting from the town. The sacrifice was made by the warriors as they had been fortunate to get some fresh vigour (*cinaipeṛruṭaimaiyāl*).

3) Kempanapura, Mysore District. *Epigraphia Carnatica* (n.s.), iv, Ch.146. c. 1050.

Vēlūr *alias* Rājādhirāja-caturvēdimaṅgalam in Padi-nāṭu was made an *eṛivīra-paṭṭanam*, most probably by the *vīrar* themselves in the presence of the *camayam*. Some allowance for dress is provided to some guards and lamp oil was gifted to the temple of Kavaṛai-īśvarm-uṭaiyār.

[The published reading and translation of the inscription are defective to a great extent].

³⁵ Besides the *eṛivīra-paṭṭinam* inscriptions of Sri Lanka, which provide evidence for the patronage of the Buddhist institutions by the Tamil merchants, there are in Polonnaruwa itself some supporting inscriptions. For example, a short 11th century inscription records a Buddhist temple called *aññūruva-perumpalli* established by the Ayyāvoḷe-500 at that place. A.Veluppillai, *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, vol. II, p. 12.

³⁶ For each inscription, its findspot, reference, and date are given first, followed by the summary. The original copies for the unpublished texts (Nos. 2, 5--7) were checked in the Office of the Director for Epigraphy, Archaeological Survey of India, Mysore. As the summaries have been made from a fresh reading of the texts there are bound to be differences with the summaries reported in *Annual Reports on Epigraphy* of that office.

4) Müđlukoppalu, Mysore District. *Epigraphia Carnatica* (n.s.), v, Kr.116. c. 11th century.

One Gaᅅgamaᅇđala-tēciyappaᅇ of Iᅇaituᅇrai *alias* Eriᅇaᅇrai-vira-paᅇᅇaᅇnam in Iᅇaituᅇrai-nāᅇu helped the 18-bhūmi-vaiśᅇᅇāvaᅇaᅇar and the 18-bhūmi-vīᅇakoᅇi by his brave deeds, by killing enemies of Vaᅇaᅇciyaᅇ. For that the *vaiśᅇᅇāvaᅇaᅇar* (merchants) honoured him by conferment of some privileges. [The details are not clear due to mutilation of the text].

5) Vēmbatti, Erode District. (now at Kalaimagal School Museum, Erode). *ARE*, 1977, 213. Kulottunga I, AD 1074.

A big assembly of warriors (*vīᅇa-peruniravi*) made Vikramapalavapuram on the north bank in Chaiyamurināᅇālvār-nāᅇu a *vīᅇa-paᅇᅇaᅇnam* and vowed to protect the gift they had assigned to the Śiva temple of the village. Several of the warriors are mentioned by their titles flaunting their individual martial achievements.

6) Kāᅇᅇūr, Ponneri Tk, Chengalpattu District. Vīᅇᅇiruntaperumāᅇ temple. *ARE*, 1912, 256. c. AD 1100.

The big assembly (*camayam*) called Nāᅇᅇāᅇēci-peruniravi comprising the *ceᅇᅇi*, *ceᅇᅇi-putran*, *kavaᅇai*, *kāᅇᅇivāᅇ*, *kaᅇᅇāᅇi*, *bhadraᅇan*, *kāᅇᅇuᅇᅇasvāᅇi*, *ciᅇkam*, *ciᅇrupuli*, *valattukkai*, and *vāᅇiᅇaᅇ* which met at Mayilāᅇᅇpil decided to convert the town Ayyappuᅇal *alias* Kāᅇᅇūr into a *vīᅇa-paᅇᅇiᅇnam* and permitted some privileges to the town. The privileges mentioned by a vague phrase reading "that which is being paid shall not be paid (hereafter) and that which is collected should be collected (forfeited ?) twice the rate". The *nammakkaᅇ* were warned against collecting fees and tolls in the town using brute force. The agreement was accepted both by the *camayam* (assembly of merchants) and by the *vīᅇa-peruniravi* (assembly of *vīᅇar*).

7) Ciᅇkaᅇāᅇtapuram, Musiri Tk, Tiruchirappalli District. On a standing stone slab called *cantikkal* in the village. *ARE*, 1943--44, 237. c. AD 1100.

The 18-bhūmi-vīᅇakoᅇis decide to honour a group of their comrades, called *valāᅇkai-uᅇᅇyakkōᅇᅇārkaᅇ*, of Ciᅇkaᅇāᅇtaka-puram which was an *erivīᅇa-taᅇam*, in appreciation of the latter's heroic feats in vanquishing their enemies, which helped them obtain resurgence (*uᅇᅇaᅇᅇuttamaiᅇāᅇ*).

8) Nattam (Koyilpatti), Nattam Tk, Madurai (Dindukkal) District. *Avanam*, 3, pp. 35--36. c. AD 1100.

Damaged. Relates to the planting of foundation stone of *vīᅇataᅇam* by the 18-bhūmi-vīᅇakoᅇi of the town called Eᅇiᅇaᅇai-nallūr in honour of some fellow warriors who did some heroic feats to protect them. The Five-hundred and the *nāᅇᅇu-ceᅇᅇis* were present in the big assembly along with the *vīᅇakoᅇi*.

9) Viharehinna, near Moragolla of Kandapalle Koralle, Matale North District, Srilanka. On a stone slab within the ruined Buddha Vihara complex. *Avanam*, 9, pp. 33--34. c. AD 1150.

[Summary given in the body of the article].

10) Budumuttava, Kurunegala District, Sri Lanka. On a stone slab fixed into a wall in the Rājamahā Vihāra.
Avanam, 9, pp. 37--38. c. AD 1150.

[Summary given in the body of the article].

11) Detiyamulla, Kurunegala District, Sri Lanka. Buddhist temple. *Avanam*, 9, pp. 34--36. c.1150.

The *vīraḷoṭi* decided to relinquish their fees and cloth-money for the lamp service to the deity of Lōkaperuñceṭṭiyār in the town called Śrī bhayankarapura-nānātēci-paṭṭanam in appreciation of the patronage and the honours they received from the Greatmen (*perumakkaḷ*) of the town.

12) Galtenpitiya (near Mahanameriya), Kurunegala District, Sri Lanka. Buddhist temple. *Avanam*, 9, pp. 36--37. c.1150.

The inscription is worn out much. The contents seem to be very similar to the above.

13) Padaviya near Hattipola, Kurunegala District, Srilanka.
A. Veluppillai, Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions, I, pp. 54--55; Ibid, II, pp. 19--20. (Text from a fresh ink copy). c. AD 1150.

The *18-bhūmi vīraḷoṭi* of Pati *alias* Southern (*ten*) Aipolil-vīrapaṭṭanam, including Vikkarama-kaṭikaittāvaḷam, having assembled in full, decided to contribute the money (*paṇam*), cloth (*pāvāṭai*), and all other dues they were entitled to in this town for the lamp service to god Viṭaṅkar called Valaṅkai-vēḷaikkāran. The document of the decision is called *vīraśāsana* at the end.

14) Vahalkada, Anuradhapura District, Sri Lanka.
Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions, I, pp. 53--54 & plate; II, pp. 7--8. c.AD 1150.

The *18-bhūmi-nāṭṭu-ceṭṭis* and the *18-bhūmi-vīraḷoṭis* took oath to protect the town Kāṭṭa-nēri as it was a *nānātēci vīra-paṭṭanam*.