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Interpretation of urban growth pattern through epigraphic evidences: A study

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Abstract
City planning is one of the earliest technological advances that helped achieve a well-planned society. Demarcation of spaces as private, semipublic, public, residential, commercial, and administrative, paved way for a balanced organic growth of settlements. Study of cities can be attempted taking into consideration several primary and secondary sources. In the case of south India, the towns are predominantly temple centric. The agamas and other traditional manuals on architecture and planning elaborates the steps to be followed from the scratch. The settlements that developed based on sacred sites became centers of religious significance. It was easier for the monarchs to develop and control the centers as temple centric settlements. Traditional ways of livelihood were groomed in such centers and the temple became the central point of focus. *Silasasanas* or epigraphic evidences on stone became a tradition available from the *Pallava* times in temples. Temple wars bare testimony to the development of the settlements through periodic documentation as lithic records. A close study of the epigraphic documents in a chronological fashion gives a deep insight into the development of the city.

Keywords: City planning, Tiruvannamalai, Vedas, agamas, nagara nirmana, inscriptions, epigraphy

Introduction
Tiruvannamalai is a popular town and capital of the district by the same name in the northern part of the state of Tamil Nadu. Referred to in ancient traditional manuals as *"Arunachalam",* the hill in the center of the town dominates the topography. Described elaborately in several popular *purana-s*, the hill and the town are revered by the devotees of Siva from time immemorial. Today the temple extents to around 25 acres of land and the hill is 171 meters tall. The town has today developed in to an urban center and draws religious tourists around the year. The antiquity of the town is steeped in history.

Town planning in Tamil Nadu
In the case of ancient Indian towns, starting from the river valley times (*Sindhu* valley), we see clearly laid out settlements, both city and towns with efficient road networking and healthy sanitary planning. Classification of spaces into administrative, public and private seems to have added to the strategic design of towns of Indus Valley civilization. The *"Janapadas"* and *"Mahajanapadas"* stand out as classic examples portraying the brilliance possessed by ancient Indian town planners. With a smart planning strategy, they were able to achieve tight security systems in place, provisions for harvesting natural resources and interconnectivity between cities. In the South Indian context, the topography has been dominated by settlements which are predominantly temple based whose initial stages of planning, periodic evolution and metamorphosis that it underwent over centuries is still traceable. This only proves that the initial planning come with a temple as the core has been efficient enough without a need for change of the nucleus.

Tiruvannamalai - An overview
In the South Indian context, the topography has been dominated by settlements which are predominantly temple based whose initial stages of planning, periodic evolution and metamorphosis that it underwent over centuries is still traceable. This only proves that the initial planning come with a temple as the core has been efficient enough without a need for change of the nucleus. Of all the temple towns that are popular in the state of *Tamil Nadu*, *viz*., *Kanchipuram, Kumbakonam, Chidambaram, Srirangam* etc., *Tiruvannamalai* is

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geographically positioned at a crucial juncture. It is the largest town active since the Pre historic period, very close to the tri-junction of the states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. The strategic location, has paved way for constant development by all the popular dynasties that has ruled the South Indian States.

The route connecting today's Bangalore in Karnataka, all the way up to the Eastern coast has been an active trade route connecting the old towns of the *Chalukyas* and the *Hoysalas* to the port towns on the east. Along this route, numismatic evidences has been discovered in plenty which supports the claim that the route running close to *Tiruvannamalai* has been an active state highway used by tradesmen from far and near.

Following the *Sangam* age with the advent of Jainism and Buddhism, the 2 popular religions from outside Tamil Nadu managed to attain some popularity in this part of *Tamilnadu* too. With its close proximity with the city of *Kanchipuram*, *Jains* sites have managed to spill over to the district of *Tiruvannamalai* too. The district has considerable population of Tamil *Jains* and several.

Jain Temples and their principal monastery at a village called *Melsithaamoor*, 50kms from *Tiruvannamalai.* The first available evidence for a temple based settlement active with rituals and festivals occurs in the sacred Tamil works of the *Nayanmar* saint around the 7th century *Gnanasambandar* and *Appar* have visited the shrine and have sung about the city, the temple, the deity and the people. It is there that we get a clear picture of the tradition of worshipping the hill as the presiding deity himself. The natural resources of the hill grandeur and its imposing nature has been described with scenic similes and metaphors.

Understanding the time line
History of *Tiruvannamalai* starts from the *puranic* traditions. However through epigraphic records, the earliest available inscriptions documented so far are only from 10th century CE *Chola* monarchs. This is followed by a brief period of later *Pandya* rule (13th-14th century CE), a good deal of *Hoysala* inscriptions, *Vijaya Nagara* kings and the *Nayaks*. We do find inscriptions from minor kingdoms like the *Banas, Sambuvarayars* and *Vanakovaraiyars*.

From a shrine to a temple
According to *saiva agamas*, *Siva* himself is identified as a divine location. Temples are built for the glorification of *Siva*. Several of these grand temple complexes have taken centuries to flourish into grand edifices. The Temple at *Tiruvannamalai* extends over 25 acres of land and this expansion hasn't happened over night. This is been achieved through commitment and dedication of kings from different dynasties, centuries after centuries. The specialty of *Tiruvannamalai* is that saints, philosophers, religious leaders through their sense of adoration and dedication have popularized both the temples and the towns.

Built out of stone, the temple complex sits majestically at the foot hills of the grand *Arunachala*. The phased developments of this temple is at par with similar developments of temple complexes around Tamil Nadu.

Pallavas
Pallavas have been active even from the 7th century and have been ruling from the Eastern side of *Tiruvannamalai*

and to the west were, the mighty *Chalukyas*. However it is only the literary evidences from this period which helps us paint a picture of the city, the temple, and the activities there.

Cholas
Under the *Chola* rule, the administrative fabric starts at the village level. The groups of villages were called as *"bottom or Kootrams"*. Several such *Kootrams* constituted a union which was governed by the *Mahasabha*. The *Mahasabha* members were selected periodically and were under the control of *"Adhikaris"*. The *Mahasabha* also had control bestowed upon them to administer village lands cultivation irrigation revenue taxation law and order judiciary and grants and endowments of the temple. There were local committees to take care of the welfare of the village and its people. During the early *Chola* period, 9-10th Century was when the region was referred to by the name of the mountain - *Tiruvannamalai.* Before that the region was referred to as *"Tiruvannaar"* or *"Tiruvannadu".* The deity was referred to as *"Tiruvannaatu Mahadevar"* or *"Tiruvannaatu Udayar".*

On the West wall of the sanctum sanctorum, inscriptions about donations by *Paranthaka I* around the central shrine speaks about irrigation works done there. Around the same time, *Rashtrakuta* king *Kannara Deva* (10th Century) has gifted 20 cows, curd produced from which has to be offered to *Tiruvannamalai Alwar*. With the available evidences from the early *Chola* rule we conclude that the temple on the foothills of *Arunachala* mountains which has been sanctified in the *Thevaram* works have received attention from the ruling central power and a wide participation of people from the royal family, ministers, common public.

It is from the times of *Rajaraja I* and *Rajendra I* inscriptions describing the administration and control of the temples have been found on the walls of main shrine and the compound wall of the 2nd corridor. These inscriptions speak about economic transactions with the temple as the controlling body. Also, several inscriptions from this period have been discovered as fragmentary pieces strewn around the temple suggesting that the original shrines existed at the times of *Rajaraja* and *Rajendra* have been replaced and renovated.

Unlike *Rajaraja's* inscriptions, *Rajendra's* inscriptions are pretty much available in full which helps us assume a renovation had happened between the times of *Rajaraja* and *Rajendra*. Important information about sale of land to the temple in lieu of tax is specified, land boundaries have been clearly marked and names of owners of the land is also mentioned. A very detailed inscriptions of this time speaks about installation of bronze Icon of *"Pitchai Thevar"* (*Bikshaadana,* the mendicant form of Siva). The same inscription goes on to detail out provision of food for the deity, daily *abishekam* of the deity and lamps to be lit every day in the shrine of this deity.

Review of the development under the Cholas
We notice that the political consciousness of the people have increased as never before. This was probably because of generation of wealth to agricultural production, cattle wealth and mineral resources of this region. We see individuals from the common public setting up endowments of cattle for burning perpetual lamps and participating in building of the temple with gold and donating jewelry. This

is a clear indicator of the flourishing condition of this region as a consequence of which the importance wealth size and the rituals of the temples also increased.

The inscriptions from the last phase of the Cholas stand proof to a great interest that the king and the feudatory chief had for the temple. In contrast to the political troubles *Tiruvannamalai* was prosperous and the temple was well taken care of the weakening of the *Chola* empire and the increased influence of the *Hoysala*s during the times of *Rajendra's III* is substantiated by the inscriptions is *Tiruvannamalai*. Gift of village by a *Hoysala* chief to manage the expenses of building a third *prakara* speaks about the independence the *Hoysalas* had over this region. The last *Chola* inscription found so far in *Tiruvannamalai* is from the 27th regional year of *Rajendra's III*. The temple and the town saw continuous patronage between 884-1273 CE under the mighty Cholas, with of course a break for a century which was caused due to unplanned demolition of rebuilding the old structure.

Later Pandya Times (13th - 14th Century CE)
Under the rule of *Jatavarman Vikrama Pandya*, the tradition of gifting 250 goats by a certain *Tirunaadha Perumal* for the purpose of providing milk to children in front of the main shrine of Goddess *Unnamulai Nachiyar*. Interestingly, religious leaders have donated lands and villages to the temple during this era. A certain *Sarveswara Deva*, the head of *Kalmatam* at Tiruvannamalai has gifted the Village *Kulathudaiyan Patti* for providing food offerings to the God during the night service. It is stated that the Village was a gift to the above religious mutt by a certain *Prithvi Gangar*, the local Chieftain. This transaction is an example of how a *Madappuram* (land gifted to a religious institution, mutt) can be transferred to a temple.

A significant inscription from the times of *Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan* records the transfer of the god *Tiruvannamalai Udaiya Nayanar* of all lands together with the incomes there of except 500 *kuzhis* in *Thengampattu*, a *Madappuram*. This transfer has been caused by a religious head *Hridaya Siva*, *a saivite* monastic. For the 1st time, installation of milestones has been noticed in *Tiruvannamalai* around 1333 CE. It clearly shows that the town possessed a number of streets with subdivisions in them during this period. As some of them are found on the road around the hill they seem to point to the existence of streets in those places too.

Hoysalas at Tiruvannamalai
The 1st *Hoysala* inscription from 1417 CE refers to this region as *"Annamalai Rashtram"* which comprises of *Pankala Desa* and *Annamalai Patna*. In memory of his father, *Veera Vallala III* established *Tiruvannamalai* as their 2nd Capital and named it *Aruna Samudra*. This should have happened sometime between 1315 to 1316 CE.

A few Kannada inscriptions from Karnataka identifies the town as *Arunasamudra Vallala Patna* as early as 1310 CE itself. An interesting information in Sanskrit speaks about how the district of *Vannakkapaadi* yielding 10000 *Nishkaas* (monetary denomination) through land taxes, highway tolls, excise duties, shop rent and taxes from the town of *Annamalai* were gifted by the king.

Vijayangara Rule
Cultivable lands have been gifted to the temple and the produce from it have been charted out for specific services.

There are also been cases where dry pasture of land has been gifted to the temple and they have been made cultivable by suitable treatment and the part of the produce is gifted to the temple. Several festivals like *avani moola thirunaal, periya thirunaa*l in the month of *margazhi* and the 18 day long *panguni uthiram* etc. seemed to have been celebrated in a grand manner.

Sadasiva deva
6 new tanks are mentioned to have been built near the foothills in different directions under his rule. These were probably built as Catchment tanks for streams that flows down the hill during monsoon. A floating festival in one of these tanks were initiated during the same time. Reference to a *choultry* (*chathram*) in the name of *Unnamalai Amman Chathiram* gives us a clue about people from other cities coming here on pilgrimage. The amount of donations made to this *chathiram* was exempted from taxes. A local market was conducted twice a week where Cattle food, grass, straw etc., were sold.

Veeranarasimha Raya
Inscriptions about donations to temples outside the main temple complex during this time reflects the growth of streets around the temple with shrines for other deities. It is also interesting to note how pocketed developments where rising, classified according to community. Several communities settled in clusters practicing their occupation as an identified sector. These developments also help us understand the evolution of the town into a cosmopolitan one.

Krishnadeva Raya
Krishnadevaraya, the most prominent of the kings along with his 2 queens, *Chinnamma Devi* and *Tirumala Devi* had performed several visits to the temple of *Arunachaleswara* and have marked every visit with several gifts. The King is credited with the construction of the 1000 pillared *mandapam* in the temple. Detailed description of jewelry donated by the king to various deities are also referred in the inscriptions. A notable contribution under *Krishnadevaraya* is the construction of a tank abutting the 1000 pillared hall. *Tirumaladevi Amman Samudiram*, named after the elder queen was also constructed in the outskirts of the city. Canals were dug all along the route for drawing water. The king also constituted a float festival in the month of summer.

The Nayak Kings of Thanjavur
The *Nayaks* of *Thanjavur* are popular for their extension activities in several temples. *Sevappa Nayaka*, the most popular among the *Nayaks* complete the construction of the massive eastern *Raja Gopuram*. A bi-lingual inscription (Sanskrit and Tamil), wherein the Sanskrit part was composed by *Sakthi Mangalam Srinivasa Dikshitar*, and in tamil by *Ellappa Nainar*, speaks about *Gopuram* being developed as a 11 storied structure. Quite interestingly the completion and the subsequent consecration of the golden *kalasams* happened on the 15th day of *karthigai* month, *Aangeerasa* year. This *Saka* day coincides with 19th November 1572 which is the *Karthigai Deepam* day of that year. It is interesting to note how the most significant festival day has been chosen for this important occasion. 13 golden pots have been installed on top of the *gopuram*. A

certain *Acharya* by name *Sonaadrinaatha guru*, who is a mine of good qualities and immersed in the ocean of *Saiva agamas* has advised the design and construction of the *Gopuram*. Arguably this is the last and most significant inscription which speaks about a notable development of the temple.

Observations
1. A detail study of inscriptions helps us draft an overall imagery of this sacred town and its growth during various phases of political rule.
2. Though there are vestiges of *Pallava* rule, through loose sculptures in and around the town, there are no clear evidence about the temple or the town through epigraphic records from this period.
3. However we get to understand the town has achieved religious significance from the immortal compositions of the *thevaram* authors.
4. Starting from the era of the early *Cholas, Aditya I* inscription stands testimonial to the presence of *Chola* rule from 10th century CE.
5. The temple has attained prominent social status. However donations were limited to domestic cattle and lamps. This can be safely assumed as an indicator of the magnitude of the temple.
6. Corpus of inscription from the times of *Rajaraja I* delves deep into the administration of the region and the temple. Installation of deities, setting up of endowments to feed devotees during festival, the first epigraphic reference to *Karthikai Deepam* festival etc., shows the city has developed from being a simple shrine at foot hill to a city of holy reputation.
7. Notable developments under the *Pandya's* include, an increased reference to religious institutes that have come up in the town and their indulgence in the temple administration. Land donations, extension of temple and detailed employment schemes in the temple shows the growing complication of the temple administrative unit.
8. *Hoysala* rule at *Tiruvannamalai* or *Aruna Samudra* as the *Hoysala's* called it, was certainly a turning point in the history of this sacred town. Contributions of *Veera Vallala III* during testing times shows the bond the King had for the temple, the deity and its people.
9. By the end of 16th century, with *Vijayanagara* rule at its zenith, *Tiruvannamalai* has been evaluated as one of the most prominent cities of south India. Owing to its proximity to the tri junction where Tamil Nadu meets Karnataka and Andhra, the city saw unprecedented importance.
10. Several streets were developed around and within the city and an efficient water network was installed, connecting several lakes and tanks around the city.
11. The temple saw massive developments and huge endowments created for various purposes.
12. *Chathrams* came up in the town catering to the needs of the people who came from far away cities on pilgrimage.
13. The *Thanjavur Nayaks* continued the legacy set by the *Vijayanagara* kings and concentrated on the extension of the temple.

Conclusion
Tiruvannamalai, one among the many popular temple towns of Tamil Nadu has a well-documented history cutting across the time line. Though every single happening in the long run cannot be understood, we can certainly attempt to get an overall picture about the growth and developments of this town through documented inscriptions. The change in rule and the change it caused in the urban fabric and the society of the town is clear from the evidences. Documenting temple inscriptions, compiling and collating them chronologically can be seen as an efficient tool to understand the historic growth of temple centric settlements.

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