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PUHAR AND ITS WORTHIES.

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Puhar was once a great port and city. The word means "will not enter" conveying the fact that its people were rich and did not enter another town or village begging for anything. It was also known as Pattinam or the city, as it was the city par excellence in ancient Chola land. Kakandhi was also one of its names after one of its mythical rulers. Its present name is Kaveripattinam or the city on the Kavery.* There the Kavery enters the sea as it has been doing for the last 19 centuries and more. It is 12 miles from Shiyali on the S.I.Ry., the birthplace of Tirugnana Sambandha. The road from Shiyali to the Sangamam passes by Tirunagiri where Tirumangai Alvar was born and through Svetavanam (Tiruvekadu), Chayavanam and Pallavanam.† Tradition has it that Puhar in classical times extended from the Manikarnigai in Tiruvekadu to Tirukkadaiyur and from the sea to Ellayamman Koil (lit. the temple of the boundary goddess) and ancient history amply supports it. Neydavasal and Manigramam, two adjoining villages, mean the street of weaving and the village of jewels and they were parts of ancient Puhar.

In the early centuries of the Christian era Puhar was a flourishing port. It was Ptolemy's Chaberis emporium and Kamara of the Periplus. That it was a place of great political and economic importance is also gathered from early Tamil literature—Pattinappalai of Kadiyalur Rudran Gannanar, one of the 10 idyls, speaks of its greatness. The author was presented 16 lakhs of gold pieces by King Karikala Chola for having praised his capital. Silappadhikaram composed by a Chera prince, brother of King Senguttuvan and Manimekalai, a sister epic, composed by his friend Sattan of Madura, give us a large number of interesting details about this ancient city. From the days of Karikala to the days

* According to the Akitta gataka the Great Being (Buddha) came to Damila and dwelt in a park in Kaveripattana.

† The last two form parts of Kaveripattinam even now.

of Killi-valavan when Puhar was destroyed by the sea, it was the Chola capital. Its trade was large and the Kavery had a wide and deep mouth where ships and sailors from foreign lands abounded. It had a light-house. It had communication with Mani-pallavam, an island (of Nagas?) near Ceylon, Ratnadvipa (Ceylon), Chavakam (Java) and Kalaham (Burma or more probably Sumatra). Horses, pepper, gems, pearls, sandal, coral and camphor were some of the imports into Puhar. There was a customs-house where the goods were branded with the Chola tiger-mark and assessed. Silk and Cotton manufactures were carried on in the city. Fishing has always been a staple industry of the place and time has not worn out the charm of the scene painted in literature, of the fisherfolk playing on the beach or stitching and drying the nets on holidays. Kambala Chetty of Manimekalai was perhaps only one of the many ship-owners of those days. Early Tamil literature pictures Puhar not only as a bee-hive of commerce, but also as full of groves, gardens and fields. Innumerable temples are said to have existed at this time. There were temples to Nalangadibhutam, Chathukkabutham, Satavahana and Sattan, to Sun, Moon, Kama, Baladeva, Indra, Iravadha, Karpagha and Vajra, to Vel, Siva* and Vishnu and to Buddha and Aruga. (From time to time lingas and images are discovered, while digging or ploughing). There were a number of sacred tanks and the Surya and Chandra Thirthams of Tiruvenkadu and the temple tank of Chayavanam which is believed to cure all diseases can be identified with those mentioned in Silappadhikaram. Bathing in the sea at Kavery Sangamam has always been considered sacred and the present day custom of first bathing in the Kavery and then in the sea dates from ancient times. Every year there was an Indra festival when the images of the gods were carried in a splendid procession to the sea and Puhar was destroyed as the festival was neglected. Now, every year, in the month of Magha, there is such a procession but apparently unconnected with the old festival. Manimekalai gives some instances of Sati and mentions some disgusting Saivite sects like the Kapalikas. Thus all religions

* The God of the Siva temple in the Agraharam (new) is Agasthiswara. There is an old story that Agasthaya and others went there to attend the marriage of Kavery and Sagara.

were existing then from the worship of bhutas to the worship of Siva and Vishnu; probably Buddhism was in the ascendant. The intellectual and artistic eminence of Puhar is also portrayed in the literature of the period. The king was a great patron of literature and fine arts. Nappudhanar, son of Ponvaniganar, a native of Puhar, was the author of Mullaipattu, one of the 10 idyls. Music and dancing were highly developed. Madhavi was proficient in both. There were a number of splendid buildings.

Next, we get a glimpse of Puhar in the times of Iyarpahai Nayanar, one of the early Saivite saints. He is one of the 63 mentioned by Sundara (8th century A.D.). Siva in the guise of a yogi went to him one day and was promised whatever he asked for. Siva to test his sincerity asked for his wife. The charitable Chettiar true to his word gave his wife and escorted his guest with sword in hand which he freely used against his enraged relations. To the surprise of all the mendicant disappeared in the temple of Chayavanam. Sekkilar (12th century A.D.) in writing his life calls Puhar a cool and fertile place and cool it is even now. The Nayanar's festival is celebrated every year in Puhar.

The Devaram is the next important source of information about Puhar. Sambandhar (7th century A.D.) has sung 2 songs about Pallavanam and 3 about Chayavanam. Appar, an elder contemporary of his, has sung a hymn on the God of Chayavanam. Sambandhar's peaks of the Ponni entering the sea there, the groves and fields and the abundance of pearls, precious stones and conches. He also speaks of the splendid buildings of Pattinam and that none felt hunger there or suffered from any illness. In fine, it was a healthy and wealthy place in the 7th century.

Pattinathar was another Chetty of Kaveripattinam who was a great Saivite saint. He must have lived about the 10th century A.D. A part of his works is included in the 11th Tirumurai compiled by Nambi Andar Nambi (11th century). In the last hymn in Koyil Nanmanimalai there is a reference to Sirala who was cut and served as a dish to Siva by his father Siruttonda who was a general of the Pallava King

Narasimhavarman I (625-45 A.D.) and contemporary of Sambandha. In Tiruvadamarudur Mummanikovai there are references to Sakkiyanar who threw stones at the linga and thus gained salvation, to the three (Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar), to the Perundurai Pillai (Manickavachakar) and to Varaguna Pandya (9th century) who was exorcised by the lord of Tiruvadamarudur. Above all Sundara does not mention Pattinathar in his list of Tondars or devotees.

Pattinathar's festival is celebrated every year in Puhar. The story of his life may be briefly told. Kubera was born as Pattinathar. At 36 when he grieved without a son, Siva was born as his son. The son proved a very skilful trader. On return from a particular venture from a neighbouring island probably Ceylon he brought plenty of pearls, etc. Just after his return he left an eyeless needle and a piece of palm-leaf, on which was written that even the eyeless needle would not accompany a man after his death. Catching the spirit of the scroll, Pattinathar distributed his wealth in charity and became a Sanyasi. His sister ashamed of owning a mad brother, poisoned his food but the poison burnt her own house. After cremating his mother he visited the Saivite shrines of South India. In the Tuluva country some thieves after stealing in the palace presented lord Ganesa on the way with a necklace. As it was dark they threw the garland on our saint who was in the temple. The next morning the saint was accused of theft and was to be hanged. Miraculously the gallows caught fire. King Pattiragiriyar at once fell at his feet, learnt the whole story, became his disciple and lived with him ever afterwards. Our saint's samadhi is at Tiruvatriyur near Madras.

The above story resting on tradition is corroborated here and there by his poems. Again and again, he refers in them to his original rich and luxurious life. The stanzas describing his mother's death and funeral will bring down tears in any one reading them. In a few pieces he sketches man's life from birth to death in general terms but sufficient to show his almost cynical disregard of wealth and women. There is a temple in Kaveripattinam of the Vinayakar who broke the fetters which act forms part of the story of his life.

The works of Pattinathar, all into 2 parts—those included in the 11th Tirumurai and those that have not been included. The pieces included in the 11th Tirumurai describe the various attributes and ornaments of Siva and his infinite grace. The poet is never tired of singing of the illusion of this world, the bubble of human existence, the transitoriness of earthly things and the folly of caring for the body.

The works not included in the 11th Tirumurai and found in Kalaignana Malikai series No. 3 are undoubtedly Pattinathar's. Besides containing some of the incidents of his life and some of his most popular stanzas they speak the same philosophy of the world and existence. By the way, it may be mentioned that references are found in them to Siruttonda, Tirunilakantar and Kannappar, to the impaling of the Jains by Sambandha and to the horse-jackal miracle. In this part of his works he sets a very high standard of conduct for a true devotee, considers purity of heart as infinitely more important than puja and pilgrimage. His condemnation of idolatory here is perhaps apparently inconsistent with his previous praise of the images of God as if they were real, but it is the logical outcome of a perfecting mind. Once he says Siva is in me and I am in Siva, in another place he defines God as light and knowledge and calls Siva and Sakti as universal and eternal. He exhorts us to lead a simple and contented life, to be pure, not to be called sinners, not to think evil to any and crave for freedom from the round of births and deaths.

There is a tradition that Puhar was completely destroyed by an ~~an~~ of mud after the departure of Pattinathar. The Kavery was silted and the port lost its importance. Therefore Kaveripattinam was not the Fittan of the Muhammadan historians or the port visited by Marco Polo (See pp. 63 and 192, South India and her Mah. invaders, by Dr. S. K. Iyengar). History has nothing else to record about Puhar except that it was a little commercially busy when a canal was dug along the coast by the British Government. The canal silted up about 35 years ago. Tradition has one more story about the leading family of the place now which settled there about 200 years ago. One of its members was minister to the Maharattaraja of Tanjore about 150 years back.

He dug a canal called after him Aiyaviyyanaru and gave Agraharams in charity, in the name of the king. On the occasion of the birth of a son to his master and king he presented a small cradle and chains of silver or gold ! Taking it as an insult that his servant should give such a valuable present, the king imprisoned him with only a small quantity of rice and salt to eat. The poor Brahmin pulled out his tongue and died in the jail. Just before committing suicide he wished that the big bell of the temple of his unkind family God at Tiruvenkadu should fall down and the North wall of its prakara should collapse. People say both the wishes were fulfilled and to-day the bell cannot be tied and the wall cannot be repaired ! I hope that some day this great person of Puhar will be turned by the furrow of research and the truth of the deep-rooted tradition of the honest village folk will be proved.
