
A Brief Analysis of Inscriptions Related to Kizhperur, Kerala

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Abstract: Inscriptions are often considered as one of the backbone sources of any history; be it Indian or any other foreign land. They are the most prominent source which always throws light onto the mystery ridden rooms and unravel the riddles in history. Apart from solving the mysteries of the past, inscriptions always help to draw a vivid picture of religion, festivities, custom and traditions and more importantly the administrative and economic condition of that particular place or dynasty, which no other sources of the history can provide. Kizhperur is a small village in the old Travancore, castoff from the history, having numerous temples within a two kilometer radius, and having got a lot of allusion in the various inscriptions dating from the 11th- 12th CE; scattering in various temples and palaces in and across the Thiruvananthapuram and Kanyakumari districts, substantiating the importance of this place. This article is a short attempt to bring up and try to give life to the past glory of an elapsed place in the faded mind of history, through the analysis of various inscriptions that particularly mentions Kizhperur.

Keywords: History, Inscriptions, Travancore, Kizhperur, Land Grants, Epigraphy, Kilimanoor Record

Introduction

An inscription is any writing or any engraving on any material like stone, wood, metals, ivory, bricks, potteries, shell etc. Usually, the study of these inscriptions is called epigraphy, and these include the study of ancient writings otherwise called as paleography. Compared to the other sources of history, inscriptions have the advantage of permanence. They usually talk about a special event or an affair, often connected to a particular time and place. They are frequently brief, when compared to other literary sources. Inscriptions can be classified in accordance with their content, language, age, geographical region and the surface in which it is engraved on. Another division of inscription is into official and private records, depending on whose behalf they were inscribed. According to their content and purpose, inscriptions can also be divided into donative, dedicative and commemorative inscriptions.

Lumbini pillar inscription of Asoka is a royal commemorative inscription, mentioning a specific event. Donative inscriptions are always religious in nature, as it is often

mentioning about the donations and records of installations of the religious images; or the donations made by the private people to the religious institutions; such as lamps, utensils and other materials. The most important donative inscriptions were the royal land grants. There were thousands of such inscriptions reported from India, inscribed on the stones or copper plates (Singh 2009 42).

The land of Kerala also produced a number of inscriptions, which are valuable material for the reconstruction of early Kerala history. The history of the second Chera empire can be reconstructed from the very famous Vazhapalli inscription of Rajashekhara Varman (820 – 844 CE). Other important inscriptions were, Kudalmanikkam temple inscription of Sthanu Ravi (844-855 CE), copper plates of Bhaskara Ravi Varman in 1000 CE, the Huzur plates of Ay king Karunandadakan, the Paliyam copper plate of Vikramaditya Varaguna etc.



Figure 1: Thirupalkadal Krishna Temple

Location of Kizhperur

The village Kizhperur, situated in the Chirayinkizh taluk of the Thiruvananthapuram district, juxtaposed between Attingal and Kilimanoor; two places which has a significant part in the making of the Venad dynasty. The place is a serene land filled with granite hillocks and the green paddy fields. Kizhperur possessed a vital role in the early history of South Kerala and in the making of the Venad dynasty. Most of the historians, mentioning about the royal house in Kizhperur, and it is popularly believed that when the Ays of Vizhinjam collapsed from the attack of the Pandyas, they migrated from the Vizhinjam and they merge with the Kizhperur family. The importance of the land can assert by the existence of numerus temples; namely Thirupalkadal Krishna Temple (Figure 1), Ponganaadu Krishna Temple (Figure 2), Thekkinkara Siva Temple and the Vanadurga Temple.



Figure 2: Ponganaadu Krishna Temple

Inscriptional Importance of Kizhperur

The land Kizhperur has been cited in numerous inscriptions. The earliest epigraphical record about this place came in the 10th century CE, i.e. in the Mamballi copper plate of Kollam era 143 (968 CE), ensures the existence Kizhperur. Kilimanoor record dated Kollam era 343 (1168 CE) is another epigraphic record (Table 1).

The other epigraphic record that mentions about Kizhperur is from Avanishvaram Temple near Attingal dated to Kollam era 388 (1213 CE). It mentions the ruler as Raman Kerala Varman and it's an official record. Vellallur inscription dated Kollam era 389(1214 CE) is another one. Another inscriptional record that mentions Kizhperur is the Kadinanguam inscription dated to Kollam era 390 (1215 CE). Arrur copper plate inscription of Vira Ravi Udayamarthandan, is dated Kollam era 403 (1228 CE) and another one is dated to Kollam era 426 (1251 CE) of the same author. Both inscriptions have significant importance as both of them deals with substantial administrative terms of that particular period. Varkalai inscription dated to Kollam era 427 (1252 CE), Thiruvaidaikodu Shiva Temple inscription dated Kollam era 548 (1373 CE), speaks about special type of land donation systems of that time. Navaikulam Sankaranarayana Temple inscription dated Kollam era 613 (1438 CE) mentions about different constructions and its official record and about a particular *Kumbhabhisheka* ceremony. Parakai inscription dated to 640 Kollam era (1465 CE) also mentions about Kizhperur.

Adi Kesava Perumal Temple inscriptions I and II dated Kollam eras 778 and 779 (1603 and 1604 CE) mentions about constructions and family history. Sankaranarayana Temple inscription dated Kollam era 782 (1607 CE) mentions about different types of measurements and certain gifts.

Table 1: List of Inscriptions

Sl. No.	Name of the Inscription	Author	Kollam Era/ Christian Era
1	Mamballi Copper Plate	Srivallabhankodai	143 KE
2	Kilimanur Record	Kodai Avaniaya Pillyar Thiruvadi	343 KE
3	Attingal Inscription	Raman Keralavarman	388 KE
4	Vellalur Inscription	Raman Kerala Thiruvadi	389 KE
5	Kadinamkulam Inscription	Raman Keralavarman	390 KE
6	Mamballi Plate	Devadaran Keraavarman	4 th - 5 th KE
7	Arrur Plate	Vira Ravi Udaiyamarthandan Padmanabha	426 KE
8	Varkalai Inscription	Marthandavarman	427 KE
9	Parakkai Inscription	Viraravi Ramavarman	640 KE
10	Suchindram Inscription	Viraravi Ramavarman	646 KE
11	Trivandrum Inscription	Viraravi Ramavarman	776 KE
12	Tiruvelannannur Records	Vira Kerala Rama Varman	663 & 793 KE
13	Mitranandapuram Copper Plates	Ravi Marthandavarman	13 th CE

Kilimanoor Record

The Kilimanoor inscription is written in Tamil in the Kollam era 343, citing Kizhperur on various instances. This record specifically states the village Kilimanoor, its geographical peculiarities, and the arable lands and compound sites granted by Sri Vira Adichavarman Tiruvadi who was the ruler of Venadu, for the expenses connected with the feeding of *brahmins* or with the annual temple festivities and the special persons appointed for the management of temple affairs, and the scale of expenditure in the temple Thirupparakadal (Ayyar 1999 70). The second section of the record states the daily expense of the temple was met from the various sources of paddy fields in and around Kilimanoor, and how many quantities should be measured from each paddy field. Most of these paddy fields were belonging to the Kizhperur *illam* and some were given to them as a freehold known as *karalma*. In these records three names of Kizhperur family members have been cited. One is Manikantan Madhaviyaya Pillaiyar Tiruvadi, Manikantan Ummaiyamma Pillaiyar Tiruvadi and the last one is Kodai Avaniyaya Pillaiyar Tiruvadi.

Vellallur Inscription

Vellallur is a small village very adjacent to Kizhperur, and has a temple comprising two shrines and the discussing inscription is engraved in one of the temples. It is written in

the *Vattalettu* script and the language might be old Malayalam and dated to the Kollam era 389. It catalogues a gift to the temple made by the king Raman Kerala Tiruvadi of Kizhperur for offerings and garlands (Ayyar 1999 44-45).

Mamballi Plate

These inscriptions are engraved on a set of copper plates, which belongs to the *bhandarattil* of the *Mamballi matha*, written in the *Grantha* and *Vattalettu* alphabets. From the orthographical distinctiveness as well as the numerical symbols used in the inscriptions, the date has to be assigned to the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century of Kollam era. It says about the gifts made in favour of the temple of Bhatara at Virakeralapuram by the servants attached to the palace of the king. The king's full name is given as Kizhperur Sri Vira Devadaran Keralavarman Avani anai pillaiyar Tiruvadi. The gifts were made to meet the daily expenses of the temple (Ayyar 1999).

Discussion and Conclusion

The inscriptions are often considered as one of the mainstay bases of any history; especially very valuable on the political and administrative history. They are the most prominent sources which always throws light into some of the unidentified fragments and unravel those riddles in history. Apart from solving the mysteries of the past, inscriptions always help to draw a vivid picture of the religion, festivities, custom and traditions and more importantly the administrative and economic condition of that particular place or dynasty, which no other sources of the history can provide.

This article is trying to corroborate the importance of Kizhperur, by briefly analyzing three inscriptions; namely the Kilimanoor record dated to Kollam era 343, Vellallur inscription dated to Kollam era 389 and Mamballi copper plates dated to 4th-5th century Kollam era, which discusses the name Kizhperur and the people related to the royal house. The three inscriptions have a common feature as the three of them fall in the category of donative land grants, as the king or the lord of the land gave away various gifts and grants to various temples, often related to the royal houses. The Kilimanoor records deliberate about the various paddy fields ascertained to various people and from these fields, the quantity of paddy to be granted to the Thiruparakkadal temple. Another section of the inscription citing about the quantity of grains granted from those paddy fields for the purpose of feeding the upper caste *brahmins* who come to the temple. This part establishes the social caste hierarchy that was commonly existing at that point of time and by not mentioning any other caste in the society, it ramblingly points out the status of lower caste people in the temple as well as in the society.

The second inscription is from the Vellallur temple, in the vicinity of the Kizhperur village. It was dated to Kollam era 389 and written in *Vattalettu* script and Malayalam language. It is also an inscription, which is donative in nature, as it talks about the gifts made by the king Raman Kerala Tiruvadi of Kizhperur, to the temple for offerings and garlands. The inscription is important, as it is in the Malayalam language, and

addressing the person from the Kizhperur family as the king. This inscription yet again, validating the prominence of the royal family in the history of Travancore.

The third inscription is a set of copper plates, from the *Mamballi math*, Trivandrum, it is engraved in *Vattalettu* and *Grantha* letters and assigned to the 4th to 5th Kollam era. It registers gifts made in favour of the temple of *bhatara* at Virakeralapuram, by the servants attached to the palace. These gifts were made to meet the daily expense of the temple. This inscription gives the full name of the Kizhperur king as, Sri Vira Devadaran Kerala Varma Avani ana pillaiyar Tiruvadi.

The above-mentioned epigraphical records all mention about Kizhperur as *swarooms* or *illam* (house). These Travancore inscriptions often mention Kizhperur, Jayasimhanadu and Thrippappur as the associated names of the kings of Travancore. Earlier records mention only Kizhperur, which may be regarded as the house or the dynastic designation.

These inscriptional evidences not only corroborate the significant role played by the Kizhperur in the making of Venad and Travancore history but also shows the nature of land grants, donations, different types of construction, diverse administrative terms and terminologies, numerous techniques of measurement that prevailed in that era and helps to fill the blanks in the royal family history, different ceremonies held in the major temples. The intrinsic analysis of these numerous inscriptions also helps to recreate the social hierarchy prevailed in Travancore at that time. The reconstruction and a better understanding of socio-economic life and cultural existence of common people can be extracted from these invaluable documents.

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