

PUDURU DRAVIDA BRAHMINS - A SHORT HISTORY

Dravidian Racist Parties of Tamil Nadu hold that the word Dravida denotes a race other than the Aryans of India, and consequently, Brahmins are different from Dravidas.

In Sanskrit, the word 'Dravida' means simply a 'Southerner' and Dravida Country means only South India. European and Indian scholars think that the word 'Dravida' (Dravila; Dramila; Tramila) is only a variation of 'Tamilā' meaning the language of Southerners.

DRAVIDA IN ANDHRA DESA

Ironically and curiously, in A.P., the word 'Dravida' is applied only to Tamil Brahmins who migrated to the Andhra Area, about four hundred years ago. Identified with the place where they first settled down, they came to be called variously,

Puduru Dravidulu; Tummagunta Dravidulu; Konaseema Dravidulu, Arama Dravidulu, Peruru Dravidulu and so on.

In all these appellations, 'Dravidulu' (Dravidas) stands for Tamil Brahmins, and not Tamil Non-Brahmins. Tamil Non-Brahmin settlers are usually called 'Arava-Vandlu' (Arava-People). The word "Arava" now means nothing to Tamilians of Tamil Nadu. Some scholars say that 'Aravalu' relates to "Aravam" meaning 'a snake'. In ancient times people of the lower South India were snake worshippers, and truly 'Naga-silas' i.e stone images of two entwined snakes are found in every village upto the Nellore Dt. People still worship these snakes on a particular day (Nagula Chaviti). So Aravalu might mean simply 'snake-worshippers'.

Any how, Dravidas are Brahmins in the Telugu Country, in spite of the Dravidian Racist Parties!

So the Puduru Dravida Association of Nellore District is an association of Tamil Brahmins who settled down in the Nellore area and some parts of Chittoor Area. At that time the demarcation of districts was not there.

THE SECT OF PUDURU DRAVIDAS

The Puduru Dravidas of Nellore District, identify themselves with a sect of Tamil Brahmins known as 'Brihatcharanam' or 'Brahatcharanam' of Kandramanikyam, an agrahara in Tanjore District of Tamil Nadu. The word is evidently Sanskrit. Tamilian Brahmins of this sect explain this word as 'Brihat + Charanam', supposedly meaning the 'great migration' [Brihat = big; Charanam = going] Ingenious as the interpretation is, it raises a number of questions.

1. If it is 'migration', where did they start from and where did they arrive ?
2. Does the word apply to those who left or to those who remained ?
3. How can only one sect of Brahmins in Tamil Nadu are migrants ?

What about the other sects like Vadama or Ashtasahasram ?

These questions have no logical answers.

A SUGGESTION TO THE INTERPRETATION OF "BRAHATCHARANAM"

Tamilians write the word as Bi-ra-ga-ccha-ra-nam. The doubling of 'ch' is a need of the Tamil alphabet to keep the sound as 'cha' which otherwise changes into 'Ja'. In speech, they pronounce the word as 'Bra-ha-charanam'.

It is much more probable that Tamil Brahmins over the centuries corrupted the word 'Brahma-Charanam' in to 'Bra-ha-charanam' dropping the nasal 'm'.

Observe:-

Brahma = Veda. Brahmopadesam = Initiation of the Veda. Brahmachari is a student of the Veda. Brahmana is a follower of the Veda.

In Tamil Nadu Brahmins who specialize in the study of the Veda (i.e. Brahmacharanam) and also become priests are the Brahacharanam people. They are the equivalent sect to the Telugu Vaidikas (= Brahma Charanam people).

So Puduru Dravidas are Vaidikas, like the Velanadu, Mulakanadu, Telaganya Brahmins of A.P.

They were invited to come and settle down in the Nellore area, by the village chieftains (Non-Brahmins) of this country. They were given land-grants because of their Vedic learning. They were brought here to guide the Non-Brahmin communities of the villages in Dharma. They were gurus.

THE EARLIEST EVIDENCE OF THEIR SETTLEMENT

Only some gifts of land to the immigrant Brahmins from Tamil Nadu were recorded. The village Mamidipudi, ten miles to the east of Nellore was gifted by Sadasivaraya of Vijayanagar to a Puduru Dravida of Gautama gotra in the year 1650 A.D.

The family of the original donee naturally acquired the name of the village as a surname. There are today many members in this clan which has extended down to more than a dozen generations. In the 20th century, prof. Mamidiupdi Venkatarangaiah was an illustrious descendant of the Mamidipudi clan.

THE UDALI - CLAN

Recorded evidence is a necessary but not, sufficient evidence of the antiquity of a Puduru Dravida family. There was an Udali (Udaari) Varadaraja whose commentary on Valmiki's Ramayana seems to be the first of its kind and predates the exhaustive work of Govindaraja in the early seventeenth century. Prof V. Raghavan noticed this in an article and on the suggestion of Prof Nelaturi Venkataramanaiah (P.D., historian) accepted the surname 'Udaali' as a Puduru Dravida surname. Possibly the Udalis are the earliest of the P.Ds to receive mention in literature.

All P.D immigrants must have reached their settlements in the course of about a century. Some of them first went to Tirupathi and became Vaishnavites before coming to Nellore area. Those who remained Vaishnavas settled in Gangavaram near Nellore and came to be called Gangavaram Vaishnavas. Later they came to the Nellore town and settled down around the Ranganatha Temple. *

The Progenitor of the Mamidipudi clan received the gift of the village to propogate the tenets of Visishtadwaita Vaishnavism and to teach Ramanujacharya's Sri Bhashya of the Brahma sutras. The Nelaturu and Komanduru clans of P.Ds were Vaishnavite in the beginning. These and some other surnames of the P.Ds also occur among Gangavaram Vaishnavites.

A kind of allegiance to Lord Venkateswara of Tirupati continues to be the common religion of P.Ds by and large. But those who settled down in Kalahasti developed special devotion to Lord Siva. Rama is very important to the Chadalavada clan. The Udalis have Lord Narasimha (Vishnu) as their favorite Deity. Other gods also find representation among P.D families.

On the whole, P.Ds are Vedic people known as smarthas i.e followers of the Manu-smriti. Devotion to Siva or Vishnu is personal and not basic. The manual of Vedic rituals written by Vaidyanatha Deekshita of Tamil Nadu is the religious authority for P.Ds. all Tamil Brahmins, Tamilnadu Visishtadwaita Vaishnavites and also Tummagunta Dravidas of Nellore District.

THE PUDURU DRAVIDA ASSOCIATION OF NELLORE DT. MILLENNIUM SOUVENIR

The P.Ds are accustomed to marry largely within their community and this habit has resulted in pooling and intensifying their intelligence, though biologically 'in-breeding' is not good for health. They are usually successful as teachers, lawyers and doctors. Now they are mostly opting to science and Engineering.

Note: More information is found in Appendix 1 of 3 (a) of the Constitution and Bye-laws of the Puduru Dravida Association of Nellore District.

* Miss Jayalalitha, erstwhile C.M of T.N, is a descendant of this community in Nellore.

