The Arrival of Ulaganachi and Contemporary Political Background in the History of Batticaloa: A Historical and Archaeological Study

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ABSTRACT

The arrival of the Kalinga princess Ulaganachi and its contemporary political background in the history of Batticaloa have long remained a subject of debate among historians. This study meticulously examines the timeline of Ulaganachi's arrival by correlating it with the political environment following the reign of the Anuradhapura king Mahasena (276–303 CE), the ascension of his son Sri Meghavanna (303–331 CE) to the throne, and the rule of King Gunasingha of Batticaloa. According to the chronological calculations of the Mahavamsa, Sri Lankan history and historians substantiate both the reign of King Mahasena and the arrival of Ulaganachi in Sri Lanka during the ninth year of Sri Meghavanna's reign, following his ascension in 303 CE. This is further corroborated by regional historical works, including the copper-plate inscriptions of the Kokkadichcholai Thanthondreeswarar Temple, the research article volume published by the temple, Kalinga Magan, Kulakkottan Varalaru, and Batticaloa Varalaru. Furthermore, epigraphic evidence from Samudragupta illuminates the political landscape of the fourth century CE and details the diplomatic relations between Sri Meghavanna and Samudragupta. Historians point out that accounts by the 7th-century Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang describe this sequence as the context in which the Sri Lankan monarch sought permission to construct a monastery at Bodh Gaya and provided protection for monks on pilgrimage to Gaya. Consequently, drawing upon historical data concerning the religious tolerance, maritime trade, and diplomatic relations of the Kalinga and Gupta empires, this research estimates that Ulaganachi's arrival took place in 312 CE. Additionally, Sri Lankan historians and oral traditions explain that Ulaganachi brought the Buddha's Tooth Relic and a Shivalingam, presenting the tooth relic to King Sri Meghavanna-a relic that continues to be venerated to this day. Palm-leaf manuscript chronicles such as Batticaloa Poorva Sarithiram and Batticaloa Manmiyam clarify that she established the Manmunai region and enshrined the Shiva lingam for worship there. By examining these diverse sources, this paper clearly investigates the political and religious initiatives of the Kalinga lineage in the region.

Keywords: Arrival of Ulaganachi, History of Batticaloa, Kalinga Kingdom, King Sri Meghavanna, Manmunai.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Various scholars who have investigated the history of Batticaloa have failed to accurately identify the timing of Ulaganachi's arrival, leading to diverse opinions. Some attribute this period to 398 CE, while others suggest 301–382 CE, thereby creating a persistent state of ambiguity in historical identification. Resolving this historical puzzle necessitates an investigation into the contemporary political climate surrounding Ulaganachi's arrival. Comparing the political and religious conditions of the Kalinga kingdom, the Gupta Empire, and the Anuradhapura administration provides an opportunity to precisely understand the background and year of Ulaganachi's arrival. Correlating these events with the reign of Sri Meghavanna (303–331 CE) in Sri Lankan history, using evidence cited in texts such as Batticaloa Poorva Charithiram and Batticaloa Manmiyam, constitutes a vital step in this endeavor.

RESEARCH GAP

Previous researchers have disconnected the arrival timeline of Ulaganachi from the reign of Sri Meghavanna, confusing it with contradictory later timelines. The failure to chronologically interweave the reign of King Gunasingha and the imperial rise of the Kalinga kingdom with Ulaganachi's arrival constitutes a major scholarly

gap. Furthermore, this paper addresses the logical disconnect between oral traditions regarding the sacred Tooth Relic and the Shiva lingam brought by Ulaganachi and verifiable historical data.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is essential for deeply understanding the roots of the social, political, religious, and cultural history of the Batticaloa region. It provides a coherent chronological framework to comprehend the ancient relationship between the Kalinga kingdom and Batticaloa, the syncretic lifestyle blending Shaivism and Buddhism, and the historical formation of the Manmunai region. It offers a novel methodological approach by integrating oral history with imperial historiography.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To ascertain the exact historical year of Ulaganachi's arrival in Batticaloa (312 CE).
- To synchronize Ulaganachi's arrival with the reigns of King Sri Meghavanna and King Gunasingha.
- To analyze the political and religious tolerance environments of the Kalinga kingdom and the Gupta Empire (Samudragupta).
- To unearth the historical background of the formation of the Manmunai region and the antiquity of the Swayambhu (Self-Manifested) Lingam in Batticaloa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Regional Chronicles and Local Historiography

A critical pillar of the study relies on indigenous regional chronicles that preserve traditional histories, temple legends, and local memory of the eastern province:

- **Kamalanathan & Kamalanathan (2005)** and **Nadarasa (1998)** in Batticaloa Poorva Charithiram and Batticaloa Manmiyam respectively, provide essential repositories of traditional historical narratives, administrative folklore, and local governance records unique to Batticaloa.
- **Kandaiya (1964)** (Batticaloa Tamilaham) offers foundational insights into the ancient Tamil settlements and socio-political structures of the eastern region.
- **Thayanithy (2008, 2016)** specifically contributes localized micro-historical analyses concerning Ambalanthurai-a key geographical site tied to Ulaganachi’s arrival—and examines the pre-migration socio-religious landscape of the region.

2. Kalinga Connections and Dynastic Histories

To contextualize trans-regional migrations and dynastic linkages between Kalinga and Sri Lanka, the review integrates specialized historical studies:

- **Thankeswary (1995, 2005)** explores the historical dynamics of Kalinga intrusion and leadership through works focused on Kalinga Magha and King Kulakoddan, providing critical context for inter-regional political movements and temple foundings in Tamil realms.

3. Classical Chronicles and Macro-Historical Frameworks

To anchor regional developments within broader national and pan-Asian chronologies, standard classical and travel literature are utilized:

- **Geiger (1912)** (Mahavamsa) and **Kunarasa (2008)** (Cullavamsa) serve as core canonical chronicles establishing the overarching political history, monarchical successions (such as Sri Meghavanna), and religious milestones of ancient Sri Lanka.

- **Xuanzang (7th Century CE)** (Si-Yu-Ki) supplies valuable external, contemporary foreign accounts of Buddhist geography and international maritime networks, offering a cross-cultural perspective on early medieval South Asian connectivity.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the precise historical year of Ulaganachi's arrival in Batticaloa, and what was its contemporary political backdrop?

2. What was the nature of the relationship between Sri Meghavanna, King Gunasingha, and the arrival of Ulaganachi?

3. What impacts did the historical relations between the Kalinga kingdom and Sri Lanka exert on the society of Batticaloa?

METHODOLOGY

This research is conducted primarily based on the **Historical Analytical Method** and the **Comparative Method**. Primary and secondary sources such as Batticaloa Poorva Charithiram, Batticaloa Manmiyam, and Lanka Ithihasaya, alongside epigraphical evidence (the Hathigumpha inscription) and the travel accounts of the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang, have been utilized for data collection and subjected to rigorous critical analysis.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

- **Temporal Scope:** The 4th century CE (specifically the period between 303 and 345 CE).

- **Geographical Scope:** The Kalinga kingdom, the Anuradhapura Kingdom, and the Batticaloa region (specifically Manmunai and Ambilaanthurai areas).

- **Limitations:** The study is restricted to available indigenous literary sources, oral traditions, and contemporary Indian historical contexts.

RESEARCH ETHICS

All literary and historical sources utilized in this study have been duly cited. Conclusions have been drawn using an objective, scientific approach and chronological comparisons, strictly avoiding any historical distortions.

DETAILED FINDINGS

10.1 Political Environment of the Kalinga and Gupta Empires Kalinga was a powerful maritime superpower that maintained control over the Bay of Bengal. As evidenced by Kharavela’s Hathigumpha inscription, Kalinga maintained robust maritime and trade relations with Sri Lanka, Burma, and Southeast Asia. Although weakened by Ashoka’s invasion, Kalinga subsequently rebuilt its naval and military strength, dominating regional trade routes. This maritime security network enabled royal princesses to travel and settle overseas safely.

"The Gupta Empire's period spans historically from 240 CE to 600 CE. This empire was one of the largest in the world at the time and controlled the majority of Northern India at its peak. This era shone as a 'Golden Age' in fields such as science, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and Indian philosophical traditions. Among the Gupta emperors, the rule of Samudragupta (335 – 380 CE) is highly commendable. As the fourth ruler in the line of Gupta monarchs, he expanded the empire's borders across many parts of Northern India through his military campaigns and Ashvamedha sacrifice, uniting them under a single umbrella. Although the Gupta rulers followed Vedic traditions, they supported religious tolerance and the renaissance of Hinduism. Furthermore, during the

4th and 5th centuries, maritime trade flourished remarkably in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. This facilitated the rapid spread of Indian regional cultures, settlements, and arts to Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, and other foreign lands."

During this era, Gupta emperors practiced religious tolerance, providing shelter and protection to Buddhists and foreign pilgrims (especially those traveling to Bodh Gaya) (Xuanzang: 7th Century CE, 45-48). The diplomatic relations and exchange of delegations between the Gupta Emperor Samudragupta and Sri Lankan King Sirimeghavanna serve as excellent proof of this stance (Fleet: 1888, 8-10). Such political stability and religious liberalism in Northern India provided a favorable historical backdrop for royal figures like the Kalinga Princess Ulaganatchi to travel unhindered to Sri Lanka and establish their political and spiritual foundations in regions such as Batticaloa (Kamalanathan: 2005, 32–35).

10.2 Arrival of Ulaganatchi and Chronology: The date of Ulaganatchi's arrival in Batticaloa has been subject to various historical contradictions, with some researchers placing it in 398 CE or later periods. However, when integrating the imperial context and the dynastic history of Anuradhapura, such later chronologies are clearly inconsistent with historical methodology. Specifically, Sirimeghavanna, the 19th ruler of the Lambakanna dynasty, ruled Anuradhapura while safeguarding Theravada Buddhism. During his reign, the Batticaloa region was effectively administered by his blood relative or brother, King Gunasinghe. According to reliable data from Sinhala historical texts like the Mahavamsa and Lanka Itihasaya, the ninth year of Sirimeghavanna's ascension corresponds to the year 312 CE, marking Ulaganatchi's arrival.

Comparing Sirimeghavanna’s reign (303–331 CE), Gunasinghe’s contemporary rule in Batticaloa, and the dominance of Gupta Emperor Samudragupta in North India (335-380 CE), it can be deduced that 312 CE is the historically most appropriate and accurate date. This study completely rejects later chronological claims. This timeline is strongly reinforced by indisputable evidence: King Gunasinghe allocated Mannerimunai, north of Batticaloa, for Ulaganatchi’s settlement with Sirimeghavanna’s permission, and authority was subsequently transferred to her son Adhisuthan between 340 and 345 CE (Batticaloa Poorva Sarithiram: 2005).

10.3 Origin of the Mannerimunai Region and Administrative Shifts: Mannerimunai stands out as a crucial center where land allocation and political transformation took place in Batticaloa’s regional history. Upon the political recommendation of Anuradhapura Emperor Sirimeghavanna, Ulaganatchi was sent to Panakam in Batticaloa Tamil land. Her relative and ruler of Batticaloa, the Kalinga King Gunasinghe, warmly accepted Ulaganatchi's request, and the forest-surrounded water body area of 'Manniraimunai' (Mannerimunai), located north of Batticaloa and beyond Ambalanthurai, was officially allocated for her settlement.

The Batticaloa Poorva Sarithiram mentions Gunasinghe's period as Kali year 3500, which points to the year 498 CE. A time discrepancy exists between this period and Sirimeghavanna's era. Therefore, it appears that an error exists in the recording of the Kali year in the Batticaloa Poorva Sarithiram inscription. Nonetheless, Sirimeghavanna and Ulaganatchi could well have met around 312 CE (with a possible margin of a few years), as the reigns of Sirimeghavanna and Gunasinghe occurred contemporaneously. To fulfill Ulaganatchi's request, Sirimeghavanna sends a letter to Gunasinghe. Delighted upon seeing the letter and celebrating the meeting, Gunasinghe "gave away the forest-surrounded unpopulated land area of Mannerimunai, located north of Batticaloa beyond Ambalanthurai" (Ambalanthurai is pronounced today as 'Ambalaththurai' and commonly referred to as 'Ambilanthurai'). He also cleared the forests, converted them into agricultural fields (kalani), and constructed a palace (Batticaloa Poorva Sarithiram: 2005).

As the beginning of this massive settlement, dense forests were cleared to build royal palaces and settlements. During this period, 106 cave families and 30 prison families were brought from the Kalinga country, transforming the region into a distinct administrative unit (Batticaloa Manmiyam: 1998). Initially called 'Mannerimunai' due to geographical characteristics, it naturally morphed into 'Mannmunai' over time. This migration history preserves the region's ancient settlement history.

According to indigenous historical records, administrative power was systematically decentralized to the next generation through the reorganization carried out here. Under this change, the primary sovereignty of Batticaloa was officially granted to Gunasinghe's son Kanagasenan, and the exclusive administration of the Mannmunai region was entrusted to Ulaganatchi's son Adhisuthan. Chronologically, the consolidation of Ulaganatchi's direct

rule followed by the transfer of power to her son points to the period between 340 and 345 CE (Kalinga Magon Varalaru: 1995). This land grant and administrative division laid a strong foundation for later regional divisions in Batticaloa such as Manmunai North, Manmunai South-West, and Eruvil Pattu.

10.4 Arrival of Sacred Relics and Religious Harmony: Ulaganatchi's arrival in Batticaloa was not merely a political or migratory event; it reflected the convergence of two profound spiritual traditions and served as an elevated symbol of religious harmony. Batticaloa Poorva Sarithiram and Batticaloa Manmiyam state that Ulaganatchi brought Gautama Buddha's sacred tooth relic and a Shiva Lingam, believed to have been obtained from Mount Kailash in the Himalayas, hidden within her hair.

However, the text Lanka Itihasaya records that a woman disguised as a Brahmin brought the Buddha's tooth relic and handed it over to Sirimeghavanna. He placed and worshipped it in the Abhayagiri Vihara near his palace and entrusted its protection to the monks of Abhayagiri. Subsequently, the tooth relic was placed on public display for worship. It is understood that many historical records were written concerning this tooth relic during his era. Following this, when the Mannmunai forest was cleared and transformed into settled land, the Shiva Lingam brought by her was consecrated and worshipped by establishing a temple. That temple and its location can still be seen in Mannmunai today, as clarified by Batticaloa Thamizhagam (Batticaloa Thamizhagam). Such historical events were customarily celebrated annually. The migration of sacred objects was not seen merely as a devotional act; it was regarded as a powerful politico-religious belief that sovereignty and divine authority reside wherever sacred relics are protected.

Examining this tradition in its historical context, during perilous land and sea journeys, both the Buddha's tooth relic and the Shiva Lingam were likely carried safely and secretly hidden inside Ulaganatchi's long hair. Meanwhile, the bulky Shiva Lingam was guarded through unique security mechanisms, demonstrating her profound diplomatic responsibility. Transporting sacred symbols belonging to two distinct religious traditions simultaneously highlights her administrative acumen.

Although King Sirimeghavanna, who ruled from Anuradhapura, protected Theravada Buddhism, his relative King Gunasinghe vigorously protected Saivism in Batticaloa. The harmonious coexistence of Buddhism and Saivism within the same royal dynasty and political framework embodies the spirit of this era. This religious tolerance and mutual respect laid a resilient foundation for cultural diversity and the flourishing of various spiritual traditions in Batticaloa.

10.5 Continuity of Kalinga Ties and Historical Impact: From the foundational myths of ancient Sri Lankan history, relations between Kalinga kings and the island of Sri Lanka have been an inescapable reality. Rulers who established rule in Sri Lanka, such as Vijaya, maintained Kalinga connections. It is against this enduring background that the arrival of Kalinga Princess Ulaganatchi and her settlement in Batticaloa took place. Beyond a personal migration, Ulaganatchi's arrival strengthened diplomatic relations between the Kalinga Empire and Eastern Sri Lanka while establishing Kalinga political stability on Batticaloa soil.

The Kalinga-aligned bases and regional settlements established in Batticaloa by Ulaganatchi and her descendants were not temporary arrangements. Instead, they served as historical impulses that exerted profound impacts on later imperial politics. They laid the psychological and regional pathway for the massive invasion in 1215 led by Kalinga Magha, who marched with 24,000 warriors to eradicate Chola dominance across Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa (Kalinga Magon Varalaru: 1995). Thus, the roots of Kalinga connections planted by Ulaganatchi in Batticaloa acted as a primary geopolitical and psychological springboard for Kalinga Magha's later political rise.

CONCLUSION

Comparing the background of Ulaganatchi's arrival with Sri Lankan history reveals significant similarities between the two initiatives. According to the Mahavamsa, Sri Lankan history, and historians, Ulaganatchi arrived in Sri Lanka in the 9th year of Sirimeghavanna's reign. Consequently, historical evidence clarifies that his ascension year was 303 CE. It was during such a period that Ulaganatchi met King Gunasinghe in Batticaloa. For this reason, it is concluded that his period must be contemporary with that of Sirimeghavanna.

However, observing the chronology specified in the Batticaloa Poorva Sarithiram, Gunasinghe's period is shown as 3500 years elapsed since the Kali era. Since one Kali yuga year equals 3102 years, this period translates to 398 CE. According to this figure, it records the Kali era 3500 as a past period. When observed through this comparison, a chronological discrepancy can be noted between Ulaganatchi's era and his era.

However, the study opens avenues for possibilities of alterations in the 3500 figure mentioned in the inscription verse. This conclusion is reached because the dates of other historical events and the geographical environment correlate closely. Since the political and geographical backdrops between Batticaloa and other Sri Lankan kingdoms align closely with Sirimeghavanna's era, we are compelled to reach this conclusion. When comparing these facts primarily, minor numerical discrepancies arising over time in indigenous historical records and manuscripts are likely the cause of such chronological gaps. When linking Batticaloa's history with the national historical timeline, historical logic confirms that these discrepancies can be resolved to establish that Ulaganatchi and King Gunasinghe belonged to the same era.

Thus, Sirimeghavanna's reign is closely linked with the Gupta period. Historical evidence reveals extremely close diplomatic and cultural relations between the Gupta Empire, which flourished in northern India, and the royal lineage of Sri Lanka. Historians roughly date the Gupta Empire's rule from 319 CE to 415 CE. During this period, while Sirimeghavanna ruled Sri Lanka, the rule of Chandragupta I (319–335 CE) flourished in North India. Notably, this period also witnessed the growth of Buddhism and the establishment of pilgrimage and worship rights. It was during this time that diplomatic requests and religious petitions submitted by Sri Lankan King Sirimeghavanna to the North Indian emperor were fully accepted and implemented by the Gupta monarch.

Such cordial relations between the Anuradhapura king and the Gupta emperor signify the depth of international relations at that time. Therefore, when aligned with such a solid chronological framework of global and Indian history, it becomes unambiguously clear that Ulaganatchi's arrival occurred precisely during Sirimeghavanna's era.

Furthermore, observations indicate that Sirimeghavanna's rule lasted until 303–331 or 332 CE. Following this period, Ulaganatchi's son and Gunasinghe's son were crowned as rulers of the Batticaloa country. Therefore, it is evident that the reigns of Sirimeghavanna, Ulaganatchi, and Gunasinghe concluded in the early part of the 3rd/4th century CE.

The tale of Buddha's sacred tooth relic and the Shiva Lingam being brought by Ulaganatchi hidden inside her hair still persists throughout Batticaloa Tamil land. This matter is mentioned in the text Lanka Itihasaya - History of Sri Lanka and the Batticaloa Poorva Sarithiram. In Sri Lankan history, she is recorded as disguised as a Brahmin woman who came from the Indian land, circled around Sirimeghavanna three times, and handed over the tooth relic she brought. Looking at it this way, when the Buddha passed away, his left canine tooth was obtained and initially kept under the protection of Kalinga kings. When a war broke out in the Kalinga country during the 4th century CE, Princess Hemamala and Prince Dantha brought this tooth relic to Sri Lanka hidden in their hair. There is a legend that whoever possessed this tooth relic emerged victorious and ruled the kingdom. Thus, the fact that a woman brought the tooth relic to Sri Lanka serves as evidence through both historical and legendary pathways.

When the tooth relic was brought, palm-leaf manuscripts such as Batticaloa Poorva Sarithiram and Batticaloa Manmiyam record that a Shiva Lingam was also brought. When the Mannmunai region was converted into a proper administrative seat in Batticaloa, a temple was built, and this Shiva Lingam was installed and worshipped as the principal deity (moola moorthy). The remnants of this temple and its site can still be found in Mannmunai today.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To delve deeper into the antiquity of Batticaloa's history and its Kalinga connections, the following recommendations are put forward:

Archaeological Excavations: Systematic archaeological and epigraphical field studies must be conducted in areas associated with Ulaganatchi's settlement, namely Mannmunai, Ambalanthurai, and Manniraimunai.

Epigraphical and Archaeological Comparison: Comparative studies between Kalinga Brahmi scripts and ancient epigraphical evidence discovered or discoverable in the Batticaloa region should be expanded.

Documentation of Oral History: National projects should be established to scientifically compile and document oral traditions and folklore related to Ulaganatchi, Svayambulingam, and Kalinga Magha's invasion.

Education and History Curricula: To foster awareness of Batticaloa's regional history and rectify contradictory chronologies, these research findings should be integrated into university and school historical research publications.

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