



Temple and the Village Assembly with special reference to Melakadambur

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ABSTRACT

The temple occupied a place of vital importance in the history of South India. It constituted a powerful social and economic entity. There is no doubt that the temple served not only as a place of worship but also as the focus of the material life of the people. In this chapter the inscriptions of Melakadambur temple mention the different social groups and economic milieu of the village connected and concerned with the temple and the village. The donations made to the temple were in cash and kind and such donations have been properly studied. People belonging to the various castes live together in this village. In those days the temple must have been the common place where all the people forgot their minor differences.

KEY WORDS: VEDIYAR, MARAIYOR, ARAVOR, KAUSIKA, JIVITA, AND BHOGA

Introduction

The temple occupied a place of vital importance in the history of South India. It constituted a powerful social and economic entity. There is no doubt that the temple served not only as a place of worship but also as the focus of the material life of the people. In this chapter the inscriptions of Melakadambur temple mention the different social groups and economic milieu of the village connected and concerned with the temple and the village. The donations made to the temple were in cash and kind and such donations have been properly studied. People belonging to the various castes live together in this village. In those days the temple must have been the common place where all the people forgot their minor differences.

Brahmins played a very role in the history and cultures of Tamilnadu and occupied a prominent position in the Sangam society. However, the works relating the divisions mentioned by them are different from fourfold Varna system of the Aryans. It is clear that the Varna type of caste divisions came to be established in Sangam society itself. Brahmins are otherwise known as “Andhanar”, “Parpanar” and “Irupirappalar” (dvija-twice born). The terms “Vediya”, “Maraiyora”, “Aravor” and so on were also used to denote the Brahmins. The study of Vedas, recitation of Vedas, teaching of Vedas, performing sacrifices, giving gifts and receiving donations were the six-fold functions of the Parpanar. Yet Tolkappiyar has set out that Brahmins could also become kings. In the Sangam period, Brahmins were employed as advisors, messengers and preceptors. Brahmins received gifts of tax-free lands, gold, cow and the like. The poets of the Sangam period such as Kapilar, Parpanar, Kadiyalur Rudrangannanar, Damodaran and others were Brahmins. Brahmins were living in their exclusive quarters. Those quarters were known as Parpanachcheri. In Kurunthogai, a literary piece of Sangam period, the street of Brahmins was called Asil teru. Perumpanarrupadai mentions a hamlet on the way to Kanchipuram as Maraikappalar Uraipati (Colony of defenders of Vedas). In the fourth and third centuries B.C.E., the Maurya empire which dominated North India professed a different faith causing hindrance to the Brahmins and that was why they started migrating to the south from the north. Various gotras existed in the sections of Brahmins like Kaundinya, Vatula, Kausika, Atreya, Kusyapa, Bharadvaja, Moudgala and Kapi. It is true that the Kalabharas were opposed to

the Hindu faith and Varnasramadharm. The Lands gifted to the Brahmins were disposed to put a stop to the special privileges enjoyed by the Brahmins in their period. It is known from the Velvikudi copper plates. These plates mention that a Brahmin called Narasinga a descendant of Korkai Kilan Nerkorran prayed to the Pandya king Jatila Parantaka Nedunjadayan (765-815 C. E.) to restore his original grant which was granted to Korkai Kilan Nerkorran by Palyagasalai Mudukudumi a Sangam Pandya king. During the rule of the Pallava period, the Brahmins enjoyed a privileged position with the grant of brahmadeyas. Brahmins in large numbers migrated from Andhra country to Tamilnadu and settled in Tondaimandalam of the Kaveri regions. The residential area of Brahmins was known as agraharam. Among the Brahmins there were divisions based on numerous gotras and sutras. They came into three groups as Adi Saiva Brahmanas, Vaishnava Brahmanas and Veda-reciting Brahmanas. Since they were favoured by the kings, they were politically powerful. The sway of Brahmins was very marked in the Chola period. Since there was a growth of temples during their period, a large number of Brahmin families from the north were invited to migrate to their country. Several brahmadeyas were gifted to them. These were well administered by those residing there. In the inscription of the Cholas found in the Amirthakadeswarar temple at Melakadambur this village was called a Brahmadeya. The whole area was administered by its administrative unit of Mahasabha. Thus, it can be seen that the entire village was gifted to the Brahmins during the Chola period. Brahmins were functioning in the administration of the temple. This shows that they were held in high esteem in temple administration. In the inscription of this temple the term "Kausika" referring to a gotra is suffixed to the name of a Brahmin. From this it is learnt that the division by gotra was prevalent among the Brahmins even during the Chola period. Siva Brahmanas who were followers of Agamic codes both in their domestic and temple rites, were given grants by this temple. A Brahmin lady made a gift to this temple. Apart from the Brahmins even the women of their households showed keen interest in the religious field

The prosperity of the temple depended much on the co-operation of the local bodies. This temple seems to have received the whole hearted support of not only the local governing body but also that of the village. Assemblies of the surrounding villages of sabhas were the main local body which was responsible for not only the temple supervision but also for the land transactions including the land donations to the temple. For example, the inscription belonging to the ninth regnal year of Parantaka I says that a person called Pughalan Munnurruvan purchased 9 mas of lands from the Melakadambur Sabha and donated the same to the temple. So that the income out of it would go to the family which accepted to burn the Nondavilakku. So, it is clear that all the land transactions were done through the Sabha. And it also had the power to fix the price of the land thus purchased for donation. Manradis The inscriptions of Melakadambur temple do not throw light on the social class of shepherds. However, references are made to them in the inscription of Raja Raja I, engraved on the Brahadeesvara temple of Thanjavur. It says that Kuttan Aiyaran Marudan Makkan were given 48 and 96 cows respectively and they should supply ghee to burn a perpetual lamp. It is but natural that the shepherd class of people also lived in Melakadambur village and they were also called Manradis. The Temple Lands The lithic records generally reveal the fact that this temple was having land not only at Melakadambur but also in many of the surrounding villages. Even today at Melakadambur alone 150 acres of land is owned by the temple. All cultivable land of the village was categorized into Vellanvagai also further divided into Jivita, Kani, Bhoga and Vritti. Lands belonging to eleemosynary character were categorized as Brahmadeya and Devadana lands. Melakadambur itself was a Brahmadeya village during the time Kulotunga-I as mentioned in the inscription. Devadana village was the one which need not pay land tax to the king because its lands would belong to the temple. "Jivita" and "Bhoga" mean the same. The lands denoted to a particular family which serves the temple is known as "Jivitam". Bhoga also has the same meaning, Parantaka ninth year record makes a reference to the land gifted to the temple as Jivitam for the offering of sribali and Tirupalliyeluchi. The lands donated to the temple for the Archaga was known as the Archaga bhogam. These land donations were made for various purposes like lighting of the lamp and for creation and maintenance of the flower garden. Lands were also donated to carry out repair works in the temple. Endowments and Donations Sometimes lands and sometimes gold coins were donated for various purposes. Sometimes land was donated even for conducting the festival. For example, an inscription belonging to Aditya I speaks about the land donated in order to provide food for seven days during the Vaikasi Utram festival to the Siva yogis, Panmaheswarars and sivanadiyars. Land was donated for burning the perpetual lamp (Nanda Vilakku) also. One such donation was by a merchant called Thalimanikkan during the fourth regnal year of Aditya I. Sometimes even cattle like sheep were donated for burning the perpetual lamp. Ninety sheep was donated by Pughalan Munnurruvan for this purpose during the third reign period of Parantaka I. In another type of land donation, a person by name Yalagan cleared the forest like area which remained uncultivated into the cultivable land and donated the same for burning two perpetual

lamps. Sometimes musical instruments were also donated to the temple. A person by name Solaisatan gave Timilai and other musical instruments to the temple. This happened in the fifteenth regnal year of Parantaka I. A person by name Tiruvenkadamudaiyar and a Brahmin lady by name Andalsami gave gold coins to burn Sandhi lamp. An earliest inscription, belonging to the tenth and eleventh century speaks about Andetevan, Brahmani Ammai Piratti and Andanisami giving gold coins to burn “sandhi lamp” and Tiruvilakku. On certain occasions the donation was in the form of remitting taxes due from the temple authorities. In the tenth regnal year of Jatavarman Sundarapandyan, the Sabaiyar Nattar Udaiyar, Kalingarayar and Adhittadevar of Melakadambur accepted to remit the taxes like Thattar battam, Kulavanminbattam, sanaikkadai, Vettaikaran kadai, Vannarakasu and Uppuvalicharikai from the month of Markali. These taxes become due from the donations in the village of Vidayavilanganallur and Ponveyndaperumalnallur, donated for the sathuppadi, parivattam and Vinjanam of the Amman Jothi minnamai of the Melakadambur. This inscription makes it clear that whenever land was donated to the temple and was declared as free of tax (Iraiyili). The tax due to the king was actually remitted by the sabaiyar or Nattar or sometimes even by individuals.

Irrigation and Canals This village being situated in the south of Kattumannarkoil is irrigated by a number of canals and Vanjiyaru. At many places in the various 154 temple inscriptions, the various canals are indicated as the boundaries of the lands donated. It seems that during the prosperous Chola rule many canals and even rivers were dug out. One such river was the Vira Rajendra Chola River probably dug during the period of Vira Rajendra Chola. Even today this river flows near Melakadambur village. Mentions about the canals and the river are made in the Pandya inscriptions only. It means that some rivers and most of the canals were dug out during the Chola period. In the inscription belonging to Maravarman Kulasekera Pandyan, mention is made of Vira Rajendra Chola River and the canals like Mukkal Vaykkal, Ammaiappan Vaykkal and Munnikkal Vaykkal. Mention is also made of Pandikulapatiperary probably named after some Pandya ruler. Mention is made of two canals called Arruvaykkal and Utsiruvaykkal in the inscription belong to Parantaka I also.

Land Measures The land units mentioned in the epigraphs of this temple are Kuli, Kani, Ma and Veli. The lands were measured by “kol” or rod. There were several types of measuring rods used in different periods namely. Irairukkumkol. (12th century C. E.), Kadamai Irukkum Kol (13th century C. E.) also.

Land Value Land was neither cheap nor costly and usually the payment was in gold coins. An inscription belonging to Maravarman Kulasekera Pandyan dated 1289 C. E., say that 134 coins were paid for 6 mas of fertile land 40 kulis of plot and 300 kulis of garden land.

Grains and Liquid Measurements The units in vogue for measuring the liquids and grains were “Alakku”, “Ulakku”, and “Nali” and “Paslam”. Besides, the gold and silver were weighed in Kalanju while bronze and brass were weighed by paslam. Mathal and Urkkal are also mentioned in the inscriptions. It must be the equivalent of the “marakkal” of the modern days. The unit Adavallan appears to have been used in all the three process of measurements (i.e.) land liquid and weights.

Taxes Land tax was the major tax. But there are also other types of taxes. An inscription of Jatavarman Sundara Pandya talks about the taxes called Thattar Pattam, Kulavanmin Pattam, Sekkayam, Vannarakasu and Uppuvuli Charikai. These were probably the trade taxes for the trades like weaver tax, potter’s tax, oil pressure tax, dhobi tax and salt tax etc.,

Coinage Various types of coins were known during the Chola period. The minted gold coins were called as maadai equivalent to one Kalanju or 70 grains. But the inscriptions of Melakadambur temple speak about kasu which were probably gold coins. An inscription belonging to Maravarman Kulsekera Pandyan tells that 134 kasus were given as price for 6 mas of fertile land, 40 kulis of plot and 200 kulis of garden land. Another inscription belonging to the tenth and eleventh century tells that three persons donated 10 kasus and 20 kasus for burning Sandhi Vilakku and Tiruvilakku.

Temple Gardens Since flowers are very essential for the various pujas’ temple garden or Nandavanam was very essential. One inscription belonging to Parantaka – I speaks about land donation by Vellalasingan for the person who drew water for irrigating the temple garden. This land transaction was done by the Melakadambur Sabha. Another inscription speaks about the donation of a big pond called Jalasamudram along with the gardens on all the four sides of the pond. These gardens had the coconut, mango, jack fruit and illupai trees. The pond had walls on all the four sides.

Mutts and Education The process of establishing mutts gained momentum during the tenth century C. E. Such mutts were generally attached to the temples and were located either with in the temple itself or very hear to it. These served as centres of teaching moral and spiritual education, rest houses, and as place of feeding the poor. In the case of Melakadambur temple there is only an indirect reference of such a mutt. One inscription belonging to Kulothunga I tells how the Siva Yogis, Panmaheswarars and the Sivanadiyars of various places came to Melakadambur. For the Vaikasi Utram festival and stayed there for two days. Naturally there should have been a mutt who was used as the rest house and where food was also served for all the two days. Temple mutts also served place of education references has been made in the record of Raja Raja I to the recitation of Talavakara Sama Veda. The persons who recited the Sama Veda were paid 1 1/2, Kalanju of

