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Temple And Social Settings Of Chinnamanur: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract

Chinnamanur lies 25 km. from Theni on Theni-Kumuli road in Uthamapalayam Taluk. Chinnamanur was named after a Chinnamanayakkar, the founder of the place in the time of Queen Mangammal. This place is referred to in the inscriptions as Arikesarinallur in Alanadu. It is famous for the temple called as Rajasimhesvara dedicated to Siva. Twenty seven early Pandya stone inscriptions are available in the temple.

The village, Arikesarinallaur is the former name of Chinnamanur, which denotes the combination of all the three, Murthis (god), as Sthalam (temple or place) and Theertham (holy water tanks). Its Sthalapuram was translated into Tamil from Sanskrit about 300 years ago by Poolananda Kavirayar with the help of Vanar. This purana is consisted of 945 hymns with the legend history of

Poolanandisvarar Temple. It was written on the palm leaves. Sage Soodama told the Naimicharanya Sages, Poolavanam is the greatest temple among the Siva temples mentioned in the Sankara Sangeetha in the Skandapurana. The present paper aims to explain the Social Settings of Chinnamanur from the inscriptions found in the Poolanandisvarar temple.

Keywords: Chinnamanur, Arikesarinallau, Murthis, Velalas, Mangalam, Brahmadeya.

Introduction

The Poolanandisvarar Temple has many architectural and sculptural nuances. The inscription of the temple reveals how the castes and communities in the society around the village named Chinnamanur had associated with the temples. They made several gifts, donations, and endowments for conducting poojas and festivals and others activities of the temples. The earliest inscription of the temple dated to the 10th regnal year (A.D. 1225-1226) of Maravarman Sundara Pandya I records a gift of lands by the king as Devadana to the goddess, Tirupalliyarai Nachchiyar.¹ An inscription found on the north wall of the central shrine belongs to the 6th regnal year of Jatavarman Sundara Pandya. It records the gift of articles denoted by Padinenvishyattar of Nalunagaram and also mentions the gifts made by taragar in order to meet the requirements of the Sattuppadi and Tirupparivattam of the deity.² The Siva temple is said to have been built by a Pandya king namely Rajasimha. The temple is referred to in the epigraphs as Rajasimhesvara Mudaiya Nayanar at Sri Arikesarinallur, a Brahmadeya in Alanadu. In a record of the 41st year of Maravarman Kulasekhara I (A.D. 1268–1308) the same temple is called Tiruppulandurai Udaiyar alias Rajasimha Cholisvaramudaiyar at Arikesarinallur.³

Another inscription of the same king dated in his 7th regnal year (A.D 1276) mentions the gifts granted for the maintenance of a flower garden called Rajakkanayan-Tirunandavanam.⁴ A record of Maravarman Kulasekhara I found on the south wall of the Amman shrine gives the details of donation of 5 ma of land for the expenses of a service called Tirunilakantan Sandi in the shrine of Tirukkamakottam Periyanchiyar in the temple.⁵ The 41st regnal year inscription of

Maravarman Kulasekarn I mentions the gift of articles by the mercantile bodies to meet the expenses of worship and Margali month festival in the temple.⁶

Human settlements are located where there are bodies of water like river banks and lakes. Settlements are also found in the plains where the Vaigai river flows. The villages themselves continued to grow as Mangalam or Brahmadeya. It can be seen in the names of many towns that towns were built near ponds. Madurai city was called Matakulakel Madurai and another town was called Pandyan Rajasimha Kulakel. The Pandya king Rajasimha claims to have made innumerable Brahmadeyas, and number of Devadanas and innumerable lakes.⁷When Rajasimha Pandyan was staying in a town called Kulakel in the Rashtra of Rajasimha Kulakel, in his 16th regnal year, he gave a town called Mandaraguravamangalam in Alanadu to Narchcheikaiputtur as a gift to Anthanan named Parantaka.⁸

Caste and Communities

Brahmanas

The Tamil Sangam society was divided on the basis of topography. The rigid division based upon the caste system was a later development due to the impact of Aryans. The culture of the Tamils had undergone a sea-change after the Sangam period. The Brahmanas were mostly engaged in Vedic studies and teaching. Sometimes the Brahmana priests were appointed by the kings. This is confirmed by an inscription of Jatavarman Kulasekhara . The Brahmanas received land for expounding Sivadharmā, reciting Tevaram and for burning perpetual lamp. The most distinctive feature of the Tamil caste system included four major divisions such as the Brahmana, the Arasar, the Vanigar and the Vellalas.

Tolkappiyar, a Brahmana by caste, also mentioned that there were four castes viz, Andanar, Arasar, Vanigar and Vellalar. The Tamil Brahmanas were one of many linguistic sub castes of the Brahmana caste, which was spread throughout India. Each of the linguistic regional sub caste of courses its own sub division. The struggle between Brahminical priests and Saiva Siddhantas were continued upto 9th CE. The Mahabharata tells us that Brahmins serving in temple priest were considered to be the Chandalas, low-caste untouchables among the Brahmanas.⁹The Brahmanas were top most learned

community and were the superior in the social ladder. Feeding of the Brahmanas, who were well-versed in the Vedas in the temple, was considered an auspicious and meritorious service.¹⁰

The Saiva Brahmanas there were two groups called Ahanalikai Siva Brahmanas. Ahanaligai Siva Brahmanas seem to be the earliest settlers in the region. Performing Pujas inside the Garbhagriha of the Siva temple, receiving gifts on behalf of the temple and burning lamps were some of their duties. The Member of this group attended to the ritual works performed outside the Garbhagriha. The Prefix Ahanaligai has however been absent with the names of Siva Brahmanas of Poolanandisvarar Temple who performed rituals inside the Garbhagriha (ahanaligai) of the temple.¹¹

They enjoyed rent-free land Iraiili called brahmadeyam and settled in separate villages, which were known as agraharam, mangalam and chaturvedimangalam. The agraharam is a small brahminical settlement and mangalam is a bigger settlement of the brahmins. The chaturvedimangalam as the name itself indicates was a settlement of Brahmins who were well versed in four vedas.¹²

Padinenvishayattar

Padinenvishayattars was involved in overseas trade. Padinen denotes the number eighteen. Vishayam refers to region and country. From the beginning the Tamils used this number eighteen as Padinenchittar, Padinenkudimakkal, and Padinenkilkanakku. Padinenvishayattar was an overseas traveling merchant who carried on their trade with eighteen countries. Pattanaswami was the head of the town and presided over the meetings of the merchant bodies and other local bodies.

Padinenvishayattars is involved in the pearl trade. The 41st regnal year inscription relating to Kulasekara Pandya describes the inland trade activities of the Padinenvishayattar. They had taken the goods from the ports to the inland market centres. Pepper, areca nut, and rice were handled by the members of this guild.¹³ This community people settled in the chinnamanur region. These people were great traders in the region.

Nattuchettis

The caste name Chetti particularly applied to the merchant group. It derived from the Sanskrit word Sresti. In all probability Sresti had little to do with Chetti. However the term Chetti occurs for the first time only in Manimegalai. It might have emerged from the Tamil word Chetti meaning trade. The Sresti was actually a financier or banker or sometimes referred to the head of trade guild. Chettis were the most influential commercial community. The weavers, oil mongers and others used Chetti as a suffix to their names. The members of the communities also often described themselves by the terms Nagarattar, Virakodiyar, Perunagarathar, Vaishya, Vaniya Nagaratar, Chettis and the NattuNagarathar.

The places where they lived were called Nagarams and the Chettis themselves were called as Nagarattars. The members of the Nagara were generally known as Nagarattar, Nagara Karanattar and the Nagara Madhyasta. Among the Chettis, the Nattuchettis occupied an important role in trading activities. The Nattu Chettis are said to have come from Kaveripattanam. The Poolanandisvarar temple at Chinnamanur has received endowments from rich Nattuchettiars.¹⁴ Nattuchettis among the Chettis, the Nattuchettis occupied an important place in trading activities. A remarkable community people of Tamil country were the Nattu Chettis. Chettis in his to settle down in the Chinnamanur region.

Vanikar

The merchant community followed profession of trade and commerce. They are called by different names like Vanikars, Nagarattar. Inscriptions mention the various types of trade and commerce, guild associations and organization of the traders involving themselves in various kinds of commercial works. These merchant communities own establishments connected with the production, processing and trade of their goods.¹⁵

The localities inhabited by the merchants were also known as davalam, nagaram, puram, pattinam and niyamam. In the Tamil country the Nanadesis were equated to the tisaiaiyirattuainurruvar. They traded in various articles of merchandise such as pearls, grain, salt, and betel-leaf. The Nagarattars

rendered many useful services to society and religion. They patronized learning.¹⁶ Merchants were Vaisiyar. They were called city dwellers and Chettiars in Pandya country. The streets where they lived in the cities were named Nana Desiya-Perunderu and Ainnutruvar- Perunderu.¹⁷

The 26th regnal year inscription of Jatavarman ViraPandya I (1278-79) mentions the gift of articles by the mercantile bodies to be contributed by Padinenvishayattar of the Nalu Nagaram for a festival in the month of Margali in the temple.¹⁸ An inscription found on the south wall of the central shrine belongs to the 3rd regnal year of Maravarman KulasekaraPandya I (1270-71). It records the Sale of land by two bodies called the Pannai-Seyvar and Veli-Seyvar of the certain Mahadevan Periyannayan alias Valudinarayanan Malangudi in Sembianadu on behalf of the temple.¹⁹ Another inscription of the same king dated in his 41st regnal year (A.D 1309) mentions the gift to the temple of Tirupoolandurai-Udaiyarialias Rajasimha (choli) Suram-Udaiyar.²⁰

Vellalas

In Pandyanadu society, Vellalas held a special position next to Brahmins or Antanars. They were the majority of the population in the villages. Their main occupation is agriculture. Most of them were peasants.²¹ They formed into corporation or sabha called Chittiramezhi and its Members were called Chittiramezhiperiya Nattar. They were known in the inscriptions as Boomiputhirar, Nattumakkal.²² Parantaka Pallivelan Nakan Pullan was an important official under the Pandya king Sadayamaran. Rajasimha Pandyan was the accountant of Perugarguon Velalar. All the high officials who hold the rank of Moovenda Velar belong to the Velar class.²³

The vaisiyas belonged to mostly urban areas and the vellalas were by large a rural community. The name chetti denoting a commercial community of south India was known to the sangam age also. The vellalas especially the agriculturists were a very important limb of the society. There were two types of vellalas the superior and the inferior. The superior vellalas owned land and the latter were actually cultivators and were labourers engaged in tilling. The former had the right of marriage with the royal

families. The velirs though not the same as velalas were powerful enough to become chieftains the celebrated pari, anji, kari, ori and pegan belong to this group of velirs.²⁴

Tamil castes who traced their ancestry to the Vedic and puranic gods, calling themselves, Viswa Brahmanas, Dravida Kshatriyas and Arya-Vaisyas .The earlier Tamil works describe that there were two sections among the Vellalas or pure Dravidians. A number of inscriptions of medieval Tamil country frequently refer to many divisions or sub-caste of Vellalas who were originally dominant caste of landowners and became landlords.

They were the nobility and landed aristocracy of the ancient Tamil country. Literary and archaeological sources trace the origin of the vellalas to a group of chieftains called Vel or Velir. Vellalas were the scions of the Velir chieftains who belonged to the Yadu Kshatriya clan. Another reference is that the word Vellalar is derived from Vel meaning a spear or lance and alar means people of Vel an old and archaic Tamil weapon.²⁵

They included Ko-vaisyas, Bhu- Vaisyas and Dhana-Vaisyas. Among them, the Bhu- Vaisyas were Vellala agricultural people. The Ko-Vaisyas were husband men. The Dhana- Vaisyas were trading people. Vellalas controlled the flood water and utilized it for agricultural purposes. The majority of them were cultivators.²⁶

CONCLUSION

Various types of Classes, Castes and Communities were settled in Chinnamanur region. Their Social life and activities are referred to in the inscriptions of the Poolanandisvarar temple at Chinnamanur. The land grants, donations, endowments are also mentioned in the inscriptions and how social function centred around the temple.

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