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ROLE OF TEMPLES DURING THE CHOLA PERIOD

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Abstract

The Construction of temples was considered to be a very sacred and meritorious act during the Chola period. The Chola rulers built number of temples and attested to by a large number of their epigraphs. The aim of the temple building was so noble and great services to the community. During the Chola period temple acted as a patron of scholarship and fine art. There were artistes attached to the temples. Musicians, dancers and poets daily attended on the god and these arts flourished under the patronage of temples. There were number of workers employed in the temples. The temples were served as hospitals and schools. The king, royal members of the palace and common people were endowed gifts to the temples. This paper explores the systematic administration of temples during the Chola period.

Key words: Temples, Endowments, Inscriptions, Copper Plates, Employers.

Introduction

Temples and Mutts are the two principal institutions of the Hindu religious system. Temple was the centre of all activities in the ancient period. Various schools of learning appurtenant to temples and mutts in the days of Pallavas, Cholas and the Pandyas and also various secular charities were associated with temples. Under the Cholas, temples were economic centers which provided employment and sustained many families. In Chola period, the Chola rulers were given a great importance to making land grants and other revenue arrangements for and ensuring the maintenance and proper administration of temples. Large number of Chola temples and

from the evidence of labour and material wealth expended by the rulers in their constructions proves that the temple dominated and moulded the pattern of the life of the people in all its different aspects.

ROLE OF TEMPLE IN THE SOCIETY

The Temple is the House of God and a place of worship. It was the chiefly a place of worship. It was a centre of learning. Schools and colleges were located in the temples. Endowments were made to maintain teachers and students in the premises of the temple. Sometimes hostels were attached to temples to attend to the creature comforts of the members of the educational institutions. The library was housed here, though it should have consisted only of manuscripts patiently inscribed on cadjan leaves.

Provision was made for the study of the Vedas, the Vedangas, the Tiruppadiyam (Devaram) and the Tiruvoyveli. There are various gifts made for Vedic and allied studies. In the 13th year of Parantaka I, a gift of land is made as Chandogya Kidaippuram at Kappalur. In the days of Sundara Chola, an endowment was made for holding a competition for awarding a cash prize to the best recitation of Jaiminiya Samaveda on the night of the Ardra festival in Margali in the temple at Koyil Tevarayapettai. A study of the inscriptions in the Brahadeeswara temple in Tanjore reveals that it was a great centre of wide ranging culture. Another gift of land was made to two Brahmans for chanting the Tiruppadiyam thrice daily in the temple at Lalgudy. Another gift of land was made to maintain four singers of Tiruppadiyam in the Adityesvara temple at Thiruverumbur temple in the days of Sundara Chola.

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN TEMPLES

Instrumental music was very popular in the temples of the Cholas. There were several types of instruments used during this period. They are Percussion, (*Thorkaruvi*), Wind (*Thulaikkaruvi*), Stringed (*Narambukkaruvi*), Metal (*Kanjakkaruvi*). The percussion instruments in which leather was stretched over a hollow wooden material was used for keeping time. The wind instrument flute seems to have been used. The string instruments the *yal* and *veena* were very much in use. The temples of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, Konerirajapuram, Thiruvidadamarudur and Thirunelveli had possessed many musical instruments. Instruments such as *calari*, *kokkari*, *mattala*, *idakkai*, *takkai*, *tannumai*, *yal*, *kulal*, *udukkai*, *talam*, *vinai* and *mulavu* have been practiced. A lady playing on the flute and a mattalam player in the background are depicted in the sculpture in the temple at Tiruvarur.

DANCE

The art of dance was mainly confined to temples. It was an act of dedication to the deity and was one of the traditionally prescribed items in the ritual worship. Temples were the centres of art development. As said earlier the Chola kings were believed to have established many cultural institutions consisting dancing ladies and others by granting donations

For getting proper knowledge in the art of music and dance, the dancing girls were trained by the temple under its own musicians and dance masters. An inscription from Thiruchengattangudi in Thanjavur district, states that the women acquired by purchase were trained properly before they were assigned the duty of a dancer. The *nattuvan* (dance master) and *isai Asiriyan* (music master) gave training to the devadasis in their respective arts. Dance masters and music masters, both vocal and instrumental were also appointed for this purpose. In a few temples *Uvachcher* (drummers) trained them in the art of dancing. The dancing girls were called variously as *kuttarasan*, *niruttapp-peraraiyan* and *nattuvaasan*. The Siva temple at Tiruvidaimarudur had a dance master who had trained the Taliyalar and Devaradiyar of the temple. An inscription from Dadapuram, dated in the 23rd year of Rajaraja I, mentions that dancing girls were to accompany the deity in procession, singing and dancing along with the procession.

Drama

The art of Drama, including music and dance was known as Natya Veda and this embodied principles taken from the Four Vedas each of which gave the elements of speech, song, mime and sentiment. Drama was called *Attu* or *Attani*. These were in fact dance-dramas which depicted a series of incidents. There were different types of drama, most by dance, dramas, and the important types were *Ariyakuttu*, *Chakkaikuttu* and *Santikuttu*. The artists used mock-weapons like arrows made of bamboo sticks. Thiruvudaimarudur inscription refers to the *Natakasalai*. Another inscription from the same place of the reign of Aditya II mentions the *Ariyakuttu* (dance and drama) and the *Chakkaikuttu*, held in the theatre within the temple. An inscription of the 4th year of Rajendra I refers to a grant of paddy to a troupe of actors who enacted the Rajarajeswara natakam during Vaikasi festival in the Big temple. One Tirumeni Piriatal a dancer of the Somanathesvara temple at Attur was believed to have been given prizes for her performance during the celebration of Avani festival. An inscription of the 14th year of Vikrama Chola from Thiruvengaivasal mentioned an endowment of land to Elunattunangai who had to give nine performances of *santikuttu* during chithirai festival.

APPOINTMENT OF TEMPLE SERVANTS

A large number of servants were maintained by the temple for various purposes. Some of the staff like priests, reciters of sacred texts, decorators, players on the Vina, cleaners were incharge of the internal work of the temple. Torch bearers, watchmen, bearers of vehicles, gardeners, garland makers and gold smith were external workers of the temple.

Rajaraja gave extensive lands as devadana to the temple of Rajaresvaram from all over his empire for the expenses required for the Lord Siva of the sacred stone temple.

“Udaiyar Sri Rajarajadevar Tanjavur edupittta tiru-karrali Sri Rajarajesvaram udaiyar paramasvamikku vendu nivan-dangalukkut devadanamagach cholamandalattum puramandalangalilum udaiyar Sri Rajarajadevar kudutta.... (SII, II, 4).”

The revenue (kanik-kadan) from these villages was settled orally and then engraved on stone in the temple of Tanjavur. It was laid down whether the dues to the temple were to be paid in kind (paddy) or in cash (gold), or both. In the case of payments in kind, the paddy was to be measured by the marakkal called the “Adavallan”, which was equal to the standard unit of volumetric measure for grains then prevailing viz., the Rajakesari.

At the beginning itself, it was decided whether dues to the temple were to be paid in cash (gold) or kind (paddy) or both. In case the payment was in kind, paddy was to be measured using a marakkal (unit of measurement) known as Adavallan which was the prevailing unit of grain measurement.

Elaborate administrative machinery was put in place for administering the temple. Brahmanas rich in land, connections or capital was appointed as temple treasurers, brahmacharins were selected to work as temple servants and accountants were appointed to maintain the temple accounts. Besides every temple also had watchmen, men and women temple servants, representatives for each shrine within the temple complex, superintendents, religious heads, priests, registrars of treasury records, temple registrars, gardeners and wards. This elaborate administrative mechanism put in place by Rajaraja, after refining some of the administrative features of his predecessors and one that was carried forward by his successors for at least a couple of centuries, was a testimony to his intelligence and innovativeness.

In respect of the forty villages in the heartland, the record goes into considerable details. In fact, the details regarding the extent of land (possibly determined after the great survey that Rajaraja I made during his reign) are amazing and can compare with those collected through any sophisticated modern machinery of Government set up for conducting land survey.

Appointment of Treasurers, Accountants and Temple Servants

Rajaraja I set up an elaborate administrative machinery for running the huge establishment of the temple; he issued orders, and had them engraved on stone in the temple, that the inhabitants of the brahmadeyas in Chola mandalam, in Pandi Nadu alias Rajaraja mandalam and in Tondai Nadu alias Jayangonda Chola mandalam should supply to the Lord of the Sri Rajarajes-varar temple. (i) as temple treasurers, such brahmanas as were rich in land, connections or capital, (ii) brahmacharins (manigal) for working as temple servants (tirupparicharakamseyya), and (iii) accountants (karanattar) for maintaining the temple accounts (kanakkeluda).

Leaving aside the instances where, owing to damage to the inscriptions, the number of servants to be supplied by some villages is not available, we get to know that four treasurers, 174 brahma-charins, seven accountants and nine sub-accountants were provided for service in the temple by a total of 144 villages, lying in the eight districts of Arumolideva valanadu, Kshatriyasikhamani valanadu, Uyyakkondan valanadu, Rajendrasimha valanadu, Rajasraya valanadu, Keralantaka valanadu, Pandyakulasani valanadu and Nittavinoda valanadu, all in the province of Chola mandalam. The actual numbers are likely to be slightly more.

Public Record Officers

The temple was the Public Record Office of those times. All gifts and endowments by kings, queens, local bodies or private individuals were, with the approval of the local bodies, engraved on loose stone slab. Later when temples were built of stone, on the outer walls of the vimana, the mandapas and prakaras of temples. Parantaka I was generally described as Madurai Konda Parakesari. From the time of Rajaraja I, the prasasti (Meykkirti) with a distinct historical introduction (Tirumagal Pola) was a concomitant prelude to descriptions of grants and endowments,

The provision for temple services included food offerings, sandal paste, oil for lamps, celebration of festivals, clothes for deities, the feeding of pilgrims, the payment to the temple astrologer, the recitation of Tiruvoymoli, the cultivation of flower garden, the maintenance of priests, flower garden, the maintenance of priests and above all provision for repairs.

Women Officers (Adikarichchi)

The term Adhikari means one who wields adikaram or authority. The officer is referred to as, one who wields the authority on behalf of the king. Inscriptions also show that women held posts of senior officers in the administrative set up of the government and are seen supervising and issuing orders to male officers under them. Nilakanta Sastri stated that there were obvious instances of the women in the female establishments of

the queens bearing the title in their own right. Women officers were called *Adhirarichchi*. An epigraphy of Uttama Chola (976A.D) states that the administrative body meeting of the temple was attended by an accountant on behalf of the Chola queen. It is obvious that she might have had some hold on the administrative affairs of the temple. Actually, they would not come under the category of temple servants and it was only an honorary position for them. Besides, we find women officers to be appointed as administrators in the Thiruvaiyaru temple built by Lokhamadevi the chief queen of Rajaraja I. Another lady officer (Adhikarichi) Somayan Amitharavalli was also appointed to take over the administration of the Tiruvaiyaru temple. This is mentioned in an inscription of Rajadhiraja. Kundavai Prattiyar seems to have had some personal lady assistants for her help. They were referred to as '*adikarichi*' in the inscriptions. One such adikarichchi Ayyaran Devi by name has endowed 90 sheep with the temple authorities of Ravikulamanickesvaram for lighting a perpetual lamp. Two women servants were appointed to look in to the menial service of the school in the temple at Thirumukkudal in Kancheepuram district.

Devaradiyars

The term Devaradiyar or Devadasi, literally means 'female servant of gods'(Deva means God and Dasi means female servant). Dedication of girls to God was a common practice in olden days. During the Chola period, ladies attached to the temples were known as 'devanarmagal' daughter of the deity. The Chola inscriptions also refer to the dancing girls as *Talippendir* or *Talichcherippendugal* and *Nataka Mahalir* in addition to the other names. They were sometimes transferred from one place to another place by the king. Dancing girls were engaged in the temples in order to attend the menial works like cleaning, smearing, etc. But in addition to that they might have been asked to perform dance. They participated in the religious festivals and used their talent in dance and music to entertain the public.

Manickam(Ruby) is also honorary title bestowed on the temple women. It is linked with the status of women living in the temple. Earlier, this title was related with the queens and palace women and then extended to the temple women. The traditional services to the temple by the dancers was very popular under Rajaraja I. He was believed to be a great devotee of Lord Shiva and gave his heart to Lord Nataraja. In some cases, the dancing girls were remunerated directly by the temple authorities. Rajaraja I built new colonies and allotted one house for each dancing girl. Their names, door numbers and the street names were also recorded. Dancing girls were given an award of annual case in the nature of a bonus. They were called under different names according to their nature of work. The dancing girls of South India had been divided into two groups viz.,*Rajadasis* and *Alankaradasis*. *Rajadasis* performed their dance in Rajadurbars only. *Alankaradasis* seem to have performed at the time of festivals, marriages, and other communal functions.

The temple in which dancing and music took place needed professional singers and dancers. There was royal patronage to the art of dance in the temple. As said earlier 400 *Talicheri pendugalseem* to have worked in Tanjore temple. These women recruited from the temples located in different zones of Tamilnadu during the

reign of Rajaraja I. Each of these women was allotted with one house and 100 kalam of paddy. Epigraphical evidences refer that they were treated earnestly as equal to the royal ladies. These ladies seem to have been entertained the temple duties like cleaning the premises, drawing kolam or designs, cleaning the temples.

Women servants

The donors to temple were not only women of the noble family but also others from the lower rungs of the society. Such of these women donors may be examined hereunder, on the east wall of the rock-cut shrine in the Melaikkoyil “Upper temple” at Kudumiyamalai to the left of entrance, a subjoined record refers to two servants of prince Kodanda, indentical with Kodandarama Rajadiya, the eldest son of Parantaka I. Tirumerrali is the same as Melaikkoyil mentioned in the other records from Kudumiyamalai. Kadugal is part of the name of women servants of Rajaditya that occurs in the Tanjore inscription as the name of village Goddess.

Watchmen for the Temple

Before his twenty-ninth year, Rajaraja I made elaborate arrangements for the security of the temple by appointing a large number of watchmen known as “meykkappu” (body-guards); his order in this connection was to the effect that the inhabitants of the Brahmadeyas in Chola mandalam should supply temple watchmen to the Lord of the Rajarajesvaram, and that to each of these temple-watchmen, the inhabitants of the respective villages which supplied them should measure out 100 kalams of paddy per year by way of remuneration. This paddy was to be supplied and daily allowances paid every year, by the inhabitants of the respective villages, out of the tax due. And under royal orders, these allowances were engraved on stone. The order is contained in two inscriptions (SII, II, 57 and 70) which incidentally confirm that there were, to the north and south respectively of the Raja-rajana Tiru-vasal, a shrine each to Isana Deva and Agni Deva, in the directions appropriate to these dikpalas. 131 villages, which among them contributed mostly one, in a few cases, two, and in one case, 6 watchmen to the temple, the total being 143 watchmen in all.

From the inscription SII, II, 11, we get to know that there were three contingents of meykkappus, two guarding the Keralan-taka gate (the outer gopuram) and one the Anukka gate. We have already noted that the latter unit of the army was entrusted with certain responsibilities for maintaining the worship of the images of Kalyanasundara and his Consort, set up by Trailokya Mahadevi, a queen of Rajaraja I.

Temple as an Educational Centre

The Vedic college attached to the temple made provision for teaching Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, Rupavatara and certain agamas and Tantras. At Sendalai, Sundareswara temple, an inscription of the 9th year of Aditya I refers that a piece of land donated to a person for expounding the Mahabharatha everyday in the hall of the temple. The donor sing Nandisvara Bhattan was to enjoy this land in his life time. In the early Chola period, the practice of using the temple mandapas for imparting instructions continued. An inscription of Rajaraja I at Kamarasavalli mentions a gift of 15gms of gold, the interest of which was to be given to those who recited the Vedas, on the day of Margali and Tiruvadira.

Temple as a centre of hospital

The maintenance of a Vedic collage and a hostel an attached Atular salai or Ayurvedic dispensary is seen from an inscription of Vira Rajendra in the Venkatesa Perumal temple at Tirumukkudal. The dispensary made provision for the maintenance of a physician. He diagnosed disease and administered the medicine, a surgeon two persons who supplied the herbs, three persons supplied the herbs, three persons supply firewood, two nurses to attend on the patients. The hospital had fifteen sick beds, it kept a stock of medicines mentioned in the Ayurvedic treatment. The hostel fed 60 persons daily. There was provision for beds, oil for lamps, oil bath of inmates on 51 Saturdays of the year, and wages for cooks and servants. A sum of 40 katus was earmarked for the stocking of these medicines. An earlier inscriptions of the days of Rajendra I mentions a Vaidya Boga endowment by a Royal lady Kudavai Alvar for Ayurvedic dispensary at Tanjore named after her father as Sundara Chola Vinnagar Atular Salai.

Conclusion

The temple authorities received gifts and endowments and served as the managing agencies. In addition to meeting various kinds of routine expenditure connected with daily worship, celebrations of festivals and above all for the maintenance of the temple architect, the carpenter, blacksmith and other servants of the temple. Hence list of expenditure, detailed in an inscription of the 10th century of the 8th year of Uttamachola (A.D 959 to 985) at Konerirajapuram temple. The Madras museum plates of this ruler give details about his orders to some residents of Kanchipuram in connection with the Management of the temple of Ulagalanda Perumal. All the temple activities were thus directed towards the promotion of the welfare and happiness of the community.

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