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RESEARCH ARTICLE

TEMPLES THRIVED AS SOCIAL HUB REVEALED BY PERUNGULAM TEMPLE EPIGRAPHS

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Abstract

Consistently the temples of medieval Tamil Country played a significant role in the social life and social strata of the people. The social activities centred on the temples in the medieval period. Therefore the temples were served as corporations, founded with the full co-operation of the local existing social strata. This paper portrays information regarding invariable social strata of the contemporary society and the temple serves as social hub of the local region revealed by the inscriptions found in Perungulam temple.

Key words: devadana, brahmadana, neythal, vellala, ardha mandapa, paravathavar, kandikai and pujas

Introduction

The temple epigraphs especially Perungulam describe the social structure of those days namely the vellalas, the parathavars, the sudra made the devoted patronage from the invariable social strata of the local society during ruling medieval Tamilaham. The medieval society consisting various social strata, which contributed a lot for the development of the temple as a whole. From this it is learnt that the Inscriptions of Perungulam record the active interest on the society centres. Likewise, the development of the various social strata of villages and the towns were closely associated with the temple. As temples were the only recognised institutions, people gave due respect and

importance to them. The political, Social and cultural activities that prevailed in this period compelled the people to depend more on temples. People began to settle very close to the *devadana* and *brahmadana* lands and considered temple their guide and saviour. Thus, the temple-oriented society developed. The whole life of the people and the society was mostly centered on the temple.

Vellala Class

In addition to the royal patronage the next important social strata the vellalas, the agriculturalist after their agricultural products made temple endowments for its growth and expansion. For

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illustration a damaged (Tamil) Vatteluttu inscription¹ found on the south side of the entrance into the **ardha mandapa** of the Tiruvaludiśvara temple of Pandya Śadaiya Māraṇ in his 2nd regnal year records a gift of a perpetual lamp to the temple of Tiruvaludiśvarattu Ālvār at Perungulam in Tiruvaludi Valanādu by the son in law of Tayañjāttaṇ, a *vellala* of Pallip Perumbulingāvu in Tinaikkalamangalam, a village in Kudanādu. The principal deity is known as Tiruvaludiśvarattu Alvār. ² The inscription also refers the village Perungulam comes under Tiruvaludi Valanādu administrative division of the Pandya Country during the century. The record also makes mention the patronage of *vellala* community of the local region who were also responsible to conduct the regular rituals and tradition of the local temple without fail. Moreover the *vellala* community,³ who produced plentiful food grains to the Pandya Country which shows their agricultural enormous productivity and their prosperity is shown through the endowments of perpetual lamp to the local temple.

The Parathavar the Fishermen Class

In addition to the royal administrative patronage the next important social strata the **paravathavar**, from *neythal* land the fishermen after their traditional fishing made temple endowments for its growth and expansion. For illustration a An (Tamil) Vatteluttu inscription found on the north wall of the Tiruvaludiśvara temple⁴ of Pandya Sadaiya Māraṇ in his unknown regnal year records gift of a sandy *se kandikai* a division of Neythal or Marutham land on behalf of his father by Kudiyan Atulaguṇattāṇ of Nalkūr to the temple of Tiruvaludiśvarattu Alvar in the same village. The inscription makes mention the expression *se kandikai* an endowment of Marutham land, the sandy seashore land to the temple. From this it is clear the Parathavar⁵ or Pattanathar⁶, the fishermen whose settlement known as pattanam also made endowments of sandy land, Neithal or Marutham land to the primal deity of Tiruvaludisvara temple.

Sudra Class

In Tamil country, there was work-based division and not caste-based division existed in Sangam age. In subsequent the Pallava period, the

caste based division emerged in the Tamil society such as Brahmanas⁷, Kihatriyas⁸, Vaisyas⁹ and Sudras¹⁰. For illustration on a Sanskrit, Grantha and (Tamil) Vatteluttu inscription found on the slab set up near the Kasi Visvanatha shrine in the Tiruvaludisvara temple 10th century records a gift of a lamp and a copper lamp stand to the temple by a woman of the Sudra community belonging to Mahataṭaka Perungulam. She also made an endowment of livestock (sheep) for its maintenance. From this it is clear that apart from the rulers, chieftains and administrative officials Sudra woman also made endowments to the main deity of the temple for uptain religious merits. Further the donor a sudra woman also rendered an endowment of livestock for the regular maintenance of perpetual lamp. This lithic record clearly reveals that even the Sudra woman the lowest strata of the society also in order to get religious merit for her life she made an endowment of lamp in addition a copper lamp stand. From this it is inferred that this the Sudras also had the responsibility to maintain the religious ritualistic regular pujas without any fail by giving livestock endowments in addition to the perpetual lamp with copper stand. It also reveals the entire strata of the society had their own identity, magnanimity, philanthropy and responsibility. Further there is no restrictions on the medieval days regarding temple worship, temple entry, endowments of the temple by the Sudras, which also shows the systematic unconditional religious ritualistic regular worship without fail in its pursuing days.

Shepherds Class

For illustration a damaged (Tamil) Vatteluttu¹¹ inscription found on the south side of the **ardha mandapa** in the Tiruvaludisvara temple of Pandya Maranjadaiyan records a gift of sheep by a resident of Elur for burning a perpetual lamp to the primal deity of the temple. The principal deity is known as Tiruvaludisvarattu Alvar. The record mentions that the gift was received and supply the ghee for burning the lamp by one Ayan Vasandi and Ayan Sendil, both *veṭṭikudis*, were perhaps the shepherds of the local region and the inscription also mentions the settlement of the shepherds was known as *vettikudi*¹², who undertook the ritualistic worship without fail and the same registers the responsibility of the shepherd the quasi-religious functionaries of the temple.

Besides a (Tamil) Vatteluttu inscription found on the north wall of the central shrine in the Tiruvaludiśvara temple of Chola Rajarajakesarivarman, who is none other than Rajaraja I Chola in his 9th regnal year (c. A.D. 994) records a gift of 25 sheep for burning a perpetual lamp in the temple of Tiruvaludiśvarattudeva by one Pattalakam Vakal, for the merit of Nankottur Raman. Eṭṭi Solai, the veṭṭikkudi of the temple was to supply the ghee¹³. The record makes mention a livestock endowment of 25 sheep for burning a perpetual lamp by one Pattalakam Vakal, who may be an administrative official for the merits of his superior Nankottur Raman the administrative superior official. The expression Etti Solai¹⁴ may be identified as a shepherd who residing in Vettikkudi the residence of the shepherd of the religious, who regularly supply the ghee for burning the perpetual lamp without any interruption. The record also inferred that a particular amount of land of the temple may be assigned as the residential area of the shepherd class, which is known as vettikkudi one among the social strata of the local society. Further the shepherds were one among the quasi-religious functionaries of the temple who had the responsibility of rendering ghee for regular conducting religious ritualistic services.

The Kaikkola Class

Further (Tamil) Vatteluttu inscription found on the same wall of the central shrine in the Tiruvaludiśvara temple of Chola Rājarājakēsarivarman begins with the introduction 'tirumagal pola, who is none other than Rājarāja I Chola in his 5th regnal year (c. A.D. 1000.) registers a gift of sheep for burning a perpetual lamp in the temple. This endowment made by a Kaikkola of the village.¹⁵ From this it is clear the next social strata of the Tamil society the Kaikkolas also made endowment of livestock for burning a perpetual lamp for conducting regular ritualistic *pujas* without fail. Further the record clearly reveals that in

addition to the ruler, the chieftain, the administrative official, the Kaikkolas¹⁶, the weaver one of the social strata of the local society actively involved the religious temple services of the local region. Further they were also concentrated their attention on the ritualistic activities and stood as social hub of the region.

In the concluding part states that reliably the temples centred as social hub of medieval Tamil Country played a vital role in the social life and social strata of the local region. The social activities centred on the temples in the medieval period by the all sections of the society. Therefore the temples were served as corporations, founded with the full co-operation of the local existing social strata. Consistently the social strata namely the vellallas, the kaikkolas, the parathavas, the sudras, apart from the brahmanas concentrated their attention on the development of the temple of the local region. Thus the temple serves as social hub of the local region revealed by several inscriptions found in Perungulam temple.

References

1. *A.R.E.*, 1932-33, no.216; SII. XIV, no 47, p. 36.
2. *Ibid*
3. *Ibid*
4. *A.R.E.*, 1932-33, no.219; SII. XIV, no 62, p. 48.
5. *Ibid*
6. *Ibid*
7. *A.R.E.*, 1932-33, no.239.
8. *Ibid*
9. *Ibid*
10. *Ibid*
11. *A.R.E.*, 1932-33, no.215; S.I.I. XIV, no 29, p. 25.
12. *Ibid*
13. *A.R.E.*, 1932-33, no.224.
14. *Ibid*
15. *A.R.E.*, 1932-33, no.237.
16. *Ibid*
