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RESEARCH ARTICLE

LAND TENURE SYSTEM OF TAMILNADU AS GLEANED FROM CHOLA'S INSCRIPTIONS

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Abstract

The land tenure system has a long history of its own. There are references to it even in the “Arthashastra” of Kautilya. Right from the beginning of the historical period man has considered land as a very important and integral part of his life. For living and for growing the food he requires for his daily life, man depends on land. The land that each kingdom possessed decided the strength and wealth of that kingdom. Considering these factors, the kings of South India handled and managed cautiously the land wealth that was available to them and strive hard to include as much land as possible into their kingdom. It was not only the ownership of land that decided the plenty and prosperity of the kingdom, but also its efficient management contributed much to the growth of its economy. In the course of history, we come cross different types of ownership of lands considered legal by the society. Lands belonging to individuals, families, temples, religious institutions, the *sabhas* are known from the inscriptions. Different kind of land tenures are mentioned in inscriptions. In this paper an attempt is made to explain the types of land tenures in Chola period which were mentioned in their temple inscriptions.

Introduction

The land tenure system has a long history of its own. There are references to it even in the “Arthashastra” of Kautilya. Right from the beginning of the historical period man has considered land as a very important and integral part of his life. For living and for growing the food he requires for his daily life, man depends on land. The land that each kingdom possessed decided the strength and wealth of that kingdom. Considering these factors, the kings of South

India handled and managed cautiously the land wealth that was available to them and strive hard to include as much land as possible into their kingdom. It was not only the ownership of land that decided the plenty and prosperity of the kingdom, but also its efficient management contributed much to the growth of its economy. In the course of history, we come cross different types of ownership of lands considered legal by the society. Lands belonging to individuals, families, temples, religious institutions, the *sabhas* are known from the inscriptions. Different kind of land

tenures are mentioned in inscriptions. In this paper an attempt is made to explain the types of land tenures in Chola period which were mentioned in their temple inscriptions.

The land grants fall into two categories. The first category comprised grants which transferred fiscal rights to the temple but rights to the temple but rights over the possession of land were reclaimed by the donor. They transferred to the temple the produce which did not affect the royal share of the landed rights of the village landholders, permanent tenants, village officers, previous grantees and others. In some cases, this was specified in the grant itself.¹ The second category included the grants which conferred proprietorship of the land upon grantee. The donor would acquire proprietorship by inheritance, purchase or exchange², and then hand it over to the royal household who did not own land, purchased it and donated it.

Land grants to the temples gave rise to special tenures. The abundance of land such the relative scarcity of money, the immobility of the people and their attachment to the land, all circumstances favoured the growth of special tenures.³ The term of grants made to the temples differed according to the time, the place, the grantor, the grantee, the benefits to be derived from such grants or the services to be rendered in their lieu. But broadly these tenures can be divided into two heads – beneficial and services. The beneficial grants were made to the temples by the donors not in return for any material service. It was believed that the grants would bring spiritual benefit to the donors.

Service tenures fall under two categories: lands given for services to the village and lands given for services to be rendered to the temple. Services in temples were both occasional and continuous. Conducting some festival or doing dome repair can be regarded as occasional service. Continuous services rendered to the temple meant looking after its accounts, reciting the Tiruppadiyam, dancing, etc; certain commodities had to be supplied⁴ at the time of temple rituals and festivities.

Beneficial tenures held by the temple were known as tiruvidaiyattam⁵, devadana⁶, devagrathara,

devabhoga⁷, and talavritti⁸. Generally donations of land made to Siva temple were known as devadanams, and to Vishnu temple Thiruvudaiattam, to Jain and Buddhist temple Pallichchandam, to Brahmins Brahmadeyam, Bhataviruthi and to astrologers as Kani muttruttu. Grants made to schools and hospitals attached to the temple were called salabhoga⁹ and avaccalai¹⁰.

Devadana

The lands given by various individuals to the temples for its daily services and maintenance was called devadana lands. Devadana means lands given as grants to the god. As the temple was the centre of all the religious and social activities of the village of those days, patrons in large number vied with each other to give munificent grants to the temple to accrue merit. Therefore temples used to have large area of lands of different types like wet lands, garden lands and even sometimes waste lands. The officers of the temple connected with the maintenance of the accounts used to keep record of all the lands of the temple that were given to farmers on various tenures. The farmers in return supplied to the temple the required specific quantity of produce either daily or periodically. Different types of land tenures for the supply of paddy, cereals, oil seeds, oil, ghee, butter, jaggery, sugar, flowers, fruits and many other items required for the temple maintenance and services are known from inscriptions. The devadana lands sometimes were located in different village limits or place outside the village or town where the temple existed. As the devotees could be from outside the limits of the village of the temple, the grants given by them could also have been located outside the limits of the village where the temple was located. Even under such circumstances the tenants used to strictly follow the rules of the tenancy contracts. A very good instance for this type of land holding is the Tanjore¹¹ temple which is said to have its devadana lands in Ceylon. The tenancy contract rules were also sometimes flexible depending upon the circumstances.¹² When giving land grants to the temple a special procedure was followed by the donors which is mentioned in the records. They are Kudi-nikki and Kudi-nikka.¹³ Kudinikki means evicting the earlier tenants before granting the lands to the temples. Kudinikka means donating the lands to the temples

along with the tenants who hold the right of cultivating the lands. This system was followed perhaps to make the management of temple lands easier for administration.

Brahmadeya

Beneficial tenures were also commonly granted either to individual Brahmanas or to their community, and were known as Brahmadeya. Brahmadeya tenures are the land grants given to the brahmins to promote vedic studies and for the happiness and well being of brahmins. Pious donors granted different types of cultivable lands to the brahmins. Land grants given to brahmins were of two types. They are ekabhogya¹⁴ and gana-bhogya.¹⁵ Ekabhogya is given to a single individual brahmins and ganabhogya is given to a group or community of brahmins, with their shares specified. It is interesting to note that an inscription gives details about the procedure followed in the brahmadeya grants. The lands donated were marked in the regular manner by arranging an open ceremony in which a female elephant was made to beat the boundaries of the lands granted. The Anbil plates¹⁶ of Sundara Chola gives interesting information about the different types of entitlement the donee has over the lands he received as brahmadeya. It says that "the donee shall be at liberty to erect halls and upper storey with burnt bricks, to dig wells, to plant trees, to dig channels, to construct dams.etc". Sometimes the brahmadeya grants were given free of all taxes (iraiyili) or sometimes free of some specific taxes.

Virabhoga

Virabhoga is a type of land given to the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the freedom, honour and safety of their lands and its subjects from the enemies, thieves, robbers and sometimes even from wild animals. Virabhoga is normally a posthumous award. Virabhoga tenure is always granted permanently to surviving members of the donee's family. The virabhoga tenure is of two varieties viz., Udirappatti¹⁷ and Kalippatti.¹⁸ Both mean the same i.e., death due to bloodshed while fighting. These tenures were granted to honour and remunerate the service rendered by the dead in the war field. There is also another variety of

virabhoga grant which comes under the above said categories. No doubt it is named viarabhoga but it is not the grant given to the hero who died while fighting but it is a grant given for the enjoyment of the soldiers serving in the army. It is a sort of military tenure i.e., tenure called padaippaarru.¹⁹ An inscription mentions a grant of a large area of arable lands constituted into a separate unit and granted as virabhoga for the enjoyment of the kaikkola from merkkannadu who were of the Sirutanam ranks and served in the palace at Gangaikondacholapuram.²⁰ The kaikkolas were weavers, but they served in the Chola army under the banner of a separate unit kaikkola.²¹ The grant of land given as virabhoga to the kaikkolas mentioned in the said record was given to the entire community of the kaikkola army and not to any individual. It appears that the produce of the land was given by the tenants for the maintenance of this army unit.

Archana Bhoga

Archana bhoga is a grant given priests who were appointed by the specified form of worship. This grant by the temple to individual temple to perform certain was given to the incumbent of the post. As long as the person serves in that post the grant would be enjoyed by him. After his death or retirement or replacement, the grant would be enjoyed by the new incumbent who occupies that position. Temples used to have lots of land grants given by devotees. Temples, instead of maintaining these land grants, distributed these lands as temporary tenures among its employees, in lieu of payment of salary in cash to them. Various Archana bhogas are given to temple staff for doing jobs like,

1. Keeping accounts of the temple
2. Reciting Tiruppadiyam, for dancing, and for singing etc.
3. for fetching water to the temple
4. for the watch and ward of the temple.
5. for blowing the conch,
6. for performing different kinds of worship to the deity etc.

In general all the different type of services that were regularly done in the temple were considered as

services done to the God and were termed under the name of archana bhoga.

Even the grant of flower gardens for the regular supply of flowers to the temple was categorized under archana bhoga.²² Under this category of archana bhoga may be brought another type of grant called Natyabhoga (Sakkai-kani) for performing Aryakuttu (street play), at the annual festival in Tiruvavadudurai.²³ Another type of service tenure²⁴ called tattar kani is also known from the inscription. It is a land tenure given to the goldsmith in the temple (tattar) for the service he rendered to the temple. Goldsmiths were appointed in the temple invariably for assaying and evaluating the gold ornaments that were donated to the temple, so that their value could be properly accounted for. Probably he was also doing some minor works connected with the repairs of the temple jewellery.

Salabhoga

Salabhoga is a land grant given for the maintenance of the salas or the halls. The halls may be a charity home or a school or hospital²⁵, temples (for feeding students, brahmins, tapasvins, travellers etc). Sala grants were mainly land grants, the proceeds of which were used for running these charitable institutions.

Eripatti

Another type of land tenure called Eripatti is found in an inscription.²⁶ the purport of the grant was for dredging the tanks and for keeping them in good condition.

Tiruvudaiyattam and Tirunamattukkani

Tiruvudaiyattam generally means a grant given to the temple of Vishnu. Any land given to the Vishnu²⁷ temple is called by the name Tiruvudaiyattam. Likewise the land grants given to the Siva temple is called by a distinctive name Tirunamattukkani.²⁸

Pallichandam

Tamil inscriptions refer to the land grants given to the Jaina and Buddhist temple as 'Pallichandam'. Even the settlements of these two creeds were addressed to by the name pallichandam.²⁹ The etymology of the term pallichandam does not go in conformity with the names of these creeds in any way.

Eleemosynary grant

Eleemosynary grant is a donation given to an individual as an act of gratis or charity to patronize his service, talent and skill. Grants given to different types of persons following different vocations are mentioned in inscriptions. Lands given to goldsmiths (tattar kani)³⁰, village physician (Salyakriya vritti)³¹, dance master (sakkai kani)³², grammar teacher (Vyakarana vritti)³³, Poetic skill (pulumai vritti)³⁴, vedic studies (chandoga vritti)³⁵. It is interesting to note that an inscription clearly mentions the qualifications of a bhatta to receive a bhatta vritti.³⁶ According to the inscription, the bhattas must be well versed in the vedas, should be able to teach the Paninya vyakarana, and Alankara sastra and twenty chapters of mimamsa. He was not only expected to teach his pupils but also he was to feed them.

Thus the Imperial Cholas had made their mark not only in the field of conquest, consolidation, administration, art, architecture, literature and education, but also in enriching their economy by giving impetus to agriculture and land tenure system of their country.

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