

ARUNACHALESWARAR TEMPLE AT TIRUVANNAMALAI (TAMILNADU) – AN INSCRIPTIONAL STUDY

Prof.T.Ramaswamy

*Former Professor and Head, Department of Ancient History
School of Historical Studies, Madurai Kamaraj University*

Abstract

Beginning from the 7th Century A.D. the Tamil Country witnessed a religious renaissance in the form of Temple Construction. Though the Original Temple at Tiruvannamalai is older as a sanctified centre, the formal construction is started only after the Pandya and Pallava's period. The earliest evidence in the form of an Inscription is found on the Central Shrine of the temple. A number of other structures were added during the later periods of the Cholas and the Vijayanagar empires find expression in the temple inscriptions. However the Bana and the Rashtrakutas rulers were also briefly ruled these areas. The inscriptions also throw light on names of the Temple authorities and various taxes imposed during these period.

Keywords: *Prakara – Mandapa – Gopura – Territorial Divisions – Manradis – Kalanju – Chaturvedimangalam – Nagarattar – Kuli – Padikkaval – Devakanmi – Ponvari.*

Introduction

The Arunachaleswarar Temple seems to have grown around a spot where a divine power was felt at some hoary past but particularly by the 7 C. A.D., where the Saivite Saints spread their religious fervor throughout the Tamil Country. It is situated at an equal-distance to the West of Gingee, South of Takkolam, East of Sengam and North of Polur. This place occupies a position favourable to a continuous urban development. The very location of this place between the hill and plain was considered conducive for the later day military operations atleast from 15th century upto the end of Mysore Wars.

Origin of the Temple

The present day temple of Arunachaleswara had its origin in a small shrine, obviously the earliest part of the temple. Number of inscriptions found around the basement of this shrine confirmed that it is the oldest structure in the temple. After some ten centuries of construction and enlargement, the temple to-day forms a large rectangle, 465 metre long and 225 metre wide. The 100 – odd inscriptions found in the temple attested to the fact that it was patronized by the Pandyas, Cholas, later Pallavas, Banas and the Rastrakuta rulers. However, the role played by the Cholas in the reconstruction and renovation of the temple is largely known from most of the inscriptions.

Under the Cholas

The earliest Chola inscription is found on the West Wall of the Central Shrine of the Arunachaleswarar temple. It belongs to the Chola ruler Parantaka I datable to A.D. 922 (1). Following this, another inscription of Krishna III, a Rashtrakuta ruler is found on the South Wall of the same shrine. It indicates their short sway over this area.

However both these two inscriptions throw light on the donations of sheep and cows respectively to the temple, for its maintenance. In the South wall of first *Prakara* (enclosure) of the temple one could see an inscription of King Rajendra I dated A.D. 1030. (2) Another inscription of the same ruler dated 1031 A.D. is found on the same place records a gift of land, gold and 336 sheep for the purpose of lights to be burnt around the *Srivimana* at night. (3) These two inscriptions bring to light the completion of the first *Prakara* and *Vimana* of the temple by A.D. 1031 under the rule of Rajendra I.

The present second *Prakara* was built in two parts: the most ancient is the Western portion, where there are numerous inscriptions beginning from A.D. 1030 – A.D. 1040. A second partial enclosure wall was then added on its eastern side certainly before the end of 12th Century. In its Courtyard several structures were added during the 12th and 13th Centuries. The South wall of the fourth *Prakara* might have been built during the period of Kulothunga III in 1181 A.D. whose period witnessed the enlargement of the temple by adding *Gopura* of the temple (4). The part of fourth and fifth enclosure must have been designed under the rule of Ballala III (1291 – 1342 A.D.) who attached his name to the eastern gateway of the fourth enclosure. The fifth huge enclosure and its great gateways, the 1000 pillared Hall were constructed and renovated under the Nattukkottai Chettiars at the beginning of the 20th Century.

The simple temple structure in the beginning became a complex structure due to the additions made by the different dynasties such as the Pallavas, Pandyas, Cholas, Rashtrakutas and Banas. However, the Cholas overwhelmingly contributed to the enlargement and development of the temple. Even among the Chola rulers,

the inscriptions of Parantaka I A.D. 922, Aditya II A.D. 968, Rajendra I A.D.1031, Rajadhiraja I A.D. 1050, Vikrama Chola A.D.1128, Kulothunga I A.D.1136, Rajaraja II A.D.1159, Rajadhiraja II A.D.1167, Kulothunga III A.D. 1180, Rajaraja III A.D.1221 and Rajendra III A.D. 1251 found abundant in the temple.

Territorial Divisions

The existence of territorial divisions such as Nenmali – nadu, Tiruvanna – nadu, Chirranpiluyur – nadu, Adaiyur – nadu under Madhurantaka – Valanadu, Tiruvalundur – nadu under Uyyakandar – Valanadu, and Arunolideva – Valanadu are found in the inscriptions of Rajendra I. His successors Rajadhiraja I, Rajadhiraja II had created similar divisions under their rule. Tiruvuraiyur – nadu a sub division of Kshatriyasigamani – Valanadu and Vesalippadi – nadu were formed under Rajadhiraja I and Rajadhiraja II respectively. The king Kulothunga III, whose rule lasted for more than two decades left unperishable imprint on the development of the temple. Under his rule a number of sub - divisions were created, which included Palkunrakkottam, Puramalai – nadu, Tagada – nadu, Pangala – nadu, Perumur – nadu, Muraisur – nadu, Sengunra – nadu, Eyil – nadu and Senalur – nadu. King Rajaraja III created Meykunra – nadu in A.D. 1233 and Tiruvonnainallur – nadu in A.D. 1237. The above divisions find expression in their inscriptions.

Donations

In addition to the general administration of the empire, the Chola rulers focused their attention on the administration of the temples as well. As the socio-economic and religious activities are intertwined with each other, the ruler's attention in this regard became inevitable. In this connection, it is relevant to point out that shepherds (*Manradis*) and the weavers (*Kaikkolas*) held responsible position in the service of the temple. The sheep frequently donated and referred to in the inscriptions are immediately handed over to shepherds for their upkeep and regular supply of milk and ghee for the daily *pujas* in the temple. An inscriptions of Aditya II (968 – 9 A.D.) registers a gift of 96 sheep by a merchant of Kudal for burning a lamp in the temple of Tiruvannamalai Andar. The sheep were taken charge of by the shepherds of Tiruvannamalai (5) Another inscription of Aditya records a gift of 20 Kalanju of gold for the upkeep of the tank (eri) at Puliur – nadu Chaturvedimangalan (6). The people of Adaiyur, Choriyur, Maichcharrur, Mattur and Kulakkudi sold their lands for 40 Kalanju of gold and donated them for feeding in the Rajendracholan – salai attached to the Tiruvannamalai

temple (7). For bathing the deity with 1000 pots full of water, the seven members of *nagarattar* entered into an agreement to render 32 *Kalanju* of gold to the temple (8) Under the rule of Rajadhiraja I A.D.1058 an inscription registers an agreement reached with the headman to supply the sandal paste, out of the two *Kalanju* of gold received from one Arangan, the servant of the king (9). An inscription of Kulothunga III dated A.D.1183 throws light on the supply of cloth for flag (*tirukkodipudavai*) by one Danmavaniyar on all the festival days of the temple (10). The gifts of gold ornaments are also mentioned in his inscriptions dated A.D. 1192. The above donations clearly indicate the various religious functions of the temple were being supported by the general public through which the economy of the temple strengthened.

Role of Women

Some of the inscriptions throw light on the role played by women in the religious functions of the temple. When the tank belonging to Narpattenayira Pillai and Mangaiyarkarasi breached and subsequently the lands became fallow, one Tondaima – Nachiyar, daughter of Kangaiyar repaired the bund and provided the sluice to the tank at Srimahesvaranallur and brought the lands under cultivation (11). Similarly a gift of 600 *Kuli* (a land measure) of land was registered to the temple in the name of one Nilammai for her merit and welfare (12). To provide a lamp in the temple, one Komaluvalli, daughter of Kulathulan, an officer in the service of the temple, gifted 120 sheep (13). Another inscription of Kulothunga III highlighted the donation of 10 *Kalanju* (weight measurement of gold) of gold, one *veli* of land and a pedestal brass lamp by one Devu, a dancing girl of the temple for the merit of her mother, one Vembin (14). However, the inscription also records a royal order addressed to the trustees (*tanattar*) of the temple asking them to register the remission of the taxes and to make an entry in the appropriate registers, so that the benefits accorded to the *devaradiyars* should remain as such without any change in future. The temples employed *devaradiyars* to sing and dance in front of the deity whenever it required and specifically during the festival times. They were honoured with titles and donations by the rulers.

Taxes

Most of the inscriptions highlighted either the imposition of taxes or remission of taxes. The major revenue of the empire seems to be from the land. The rate of land tax is fixed depending upon the nature of land. In this connection an inscription of Rajaraja III find relevant. It

registers an agreement between temple officers and the accountant in respect of some lands and its 1/3 of produce as offerings to the temple. However, it stipulated that the taxes levied on the lands were to be at the rate of a *nali* (liquid measure quantity) per *Kuli* (land measurement) along with the *Padikkaval* (dues paid for Police duties) for the first year of cultivation since reclamation at one fourth of the full rate for the next year and from the third year at three eights of the full rate and *Padikkaval* yielding 80 *Kalam* (a grain measure equal to 13 *marakkal* used all over the Chola empire) per *Veli* (15) (land measurement).

In addition to the tax on land and agriculture, there were a number of taxes levied on people practicing different vocations. An inscription of King Kulothunga III (A.D. 1198) refers to taxes such as *Padikkaval* (Dues paid for Police duties), *Tariyirai* (Tax on looms), *Tattarpattam* (Tax on Goldsmith), *Alamanji* (Compulsory labour for the maintenance of irrigation tanks), *Kurrattendam* (Punishment for crime), *Pattittendam* (Fine imposed by Cattle Boundaries) and *echchoru* (16) (Meals offered to people who involved in Public Works during day time). However, Rajendra's III (A.D. 1251) inscriptions throw light on taxes such as *vetti* (free labour for public works), *Taniyal*, *Eriminpattam* (income from the sale of fish in the tank), *Ponvari* (tax on gold), *Mavadai and Maravadai* (enjoyment of fruit bearing trees) which are different from that of Kulothunga III (17).

The successful implementation of the temple functions definitely depends upon the efficiency of the officers of the temple. In this connection the *danattar* (charity giver), *devakanmi* (one of the major Brahmin group members associated with the temple administration), *Koyilkanakkar* (temple accountant), *Kankani* (Superintendent) and *Danapadi* (chief charity giver) constitute the authorities of the temple administration.

Conclusion

Swayed and immensely impacted by the Bhakthi Movement which ruled the spiritual and religious domain from the Century 6th to Century 14th A.D. in the Tamil Country, there was a significant increase in the temple building activities in the region. The imperial Chola epoch, having been compelled to promote ritual polity that perpetuated religious rituals as well as part of their sustainable activity, had built, patronized and encouraged temple building efforts on a large scale with well-structured temple administration. The Arunachaleswarar temple at Tiruvannamalai is one such endeavour of the Chola Kings during the period. This temple is a marvelous treasure of art, architecture and sculpture of unique style.

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