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Purpose of Grants and Growth of Temples

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Abstract

The land grants to temples were made directly to the temple treasury with the mentioning of purpose for which the donation was to be spent and with the conditions to maintain the specified services in the temple. There was an immense variety of purposes for which the land grants has been made. It led to the growth of temples. The period of the Pallavas saw the revival of Hinduism and the nayanmars and alvars played a dominant role in the building of temples. The contribution of the Cholas to temple architecture was more than that of the Pallavas and the Pandyas. Under the patronage of the Cholas, the building of temples entered on a process of gradual expansion and adaptation. A proper study of the records proves that the people attached great importance to various activities of the temples. The subsistence of a temple was related to various gifts made by philanthropists.

Keywords: *Veli, Ma, Kuli, Kani, Nali, Kalanju, Manjadi, Devadana, Bramadeya and Chathurvedimangalam.*

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Purpose of Grants and Growth of Temples

The land grants to temples were made directly to the temple treasury with the mentioning of purpose for which the donation was to be spent and with the conditions to maintain the specified services in the temple. There was an immense variety of purposes for which the land grants has been made. It led to the growth of temples. The period of the Pallavas saw the revival of Hinduism and the nayanmars and alvars played a dominant role in the building of temples.¹ The contribution of the Cholas to temple architecture was more than that of the Pallavas and the Pandyas. Under the patronage of the Cholas, the building of temples entered on a process of gradual expansion and adaptation. A proper study of the records proves that the people attached great importance to various activities of the temples. The subsistence of a temple was related to various gifts made by philanthropists.²

1.1 Purpose and its Fulfillment

The temple treasury made use of the land grant for the specified services in the temple. Most of the grants were utilised for the expenditure for worship including offerings, maintenance of perpetual lamps, celebration of festivals, feeding of Brahmins and the articles required for worship and so on. They in turn helped the temple authorities to perform the rituals and to maintain the temples in a proper way. Temple became popular because of its ritualistic and cultural activities. People were drawn towards the temple which resulted in the spread of religion.

The temple resources were spent for the various services offered to the deity and also the articles required for the puja. The various worship and their timing were mentioned in literature and contemporary inscriptions. The priests who performs puja thrice a day according to the agamas From the inscriptions it is observed that performing the pujas for two times, three times and four times a day was common. The offerings were made in the early morning, mid- day, mid-night and other timings.³ The items and the quantity of offerings differ from temple to temple depending upon the income of the temple. Various categories of sacred food offerings are referred in the inscriptions. For that fine rice, green gram, ghee, curd, plantains, sugar, vegetables, betel leaves, areca-nuts and lime are constantly required for offerings to the deity.

The temple resources were also spent for the purchase of various other commodities required for day to day conduct as well as special festival occasions. They are incenses, perfumes, decorative articles, flowers, garlands, vessels and clothes etc., There are so many evidences about the land grants made for the purchase of these articles. The land donations known as *tirumalaipuram* was made specially for regular supply of flowers and garlands to the temple. Flower gardens were also attached to many temples.⁴

The sacred ablution was another popular thing for which a considerable amount of temple resources were spent. The sacred bath of the deity was performed daily. During the special days and festival occasions, the items and quantity of the materials used for the sacred bath was more than the ordinary days. The lands known as *tirumanjanattar kani* were allotted specially for the sacred bath.⁵

An inscription from Koyil-Tevarayanpettai states that 108 pots of water were used for the sacred bath of the deity of the Tiruchchelur Alvar on all days of *sankranti* by the queen mother of Uttamachola.⁶

The major item in the temple expenditure was in connection with the festivals. Festivals form a part of the religious activities. During the Chola period the days of asterism of the kings were celebrated in a grand manner. Special offerings were made for the same. It was an occasion for the devotees to show their faith and involved many people in religious activities resulted in the spread of religion. The festivals often referred in the inscription are *margali tiruvadirai*, *masimagam*, *vaikasi visakam* and *sankranti* day.⁷

An inscription found at Tiruchchennampundi speaks about the expenditure incurred in the temple during the *masimagam* festivals (seems to be a 7 day festival) and during that 7 days festival 100 flower garlands were used daily in worship. Maintenance of lamps is one of the major expenditure to the temple. The large quantity of temple resource were spent for this purpose. Most of the inscriptions speak about the donations made to the temple for the maintenance of perpetual lamps. The lamps were lit not only during day and night but also during special and festival occasions.⁸

The processions of the deity was also one of the temple rituals referred in the inscription. The deity was taken into procession daily within the *prakara* of the temple which was called as *tiruchchennadai*. *Sribali* also seems to be a ceremony of carrying of image around the temple. Special offerings were made on that day. The deity was taken out in procession grandly on special occasions and festival times.⁹

Apart from these purposes, the temple resources and donations were spent for various other purposes like repair and maintenance of temple. Paying salary to the employees engaged in temple activities for various purposes also formed one of the major expenditure of the temple.¹⁰

The temple resources were spent for the maintenance of musicians and dancers of the temple. They were to sing hymns on ordinary and festival days. The singing of *tiruvaymoli*, *tirupadigam* were very much practised in temples and singers were properly maintained.¹¹ Besides the temple resources and donations were spent for the philanthropic activities also. For example, feeding the Brahmins was considered as a sacred duty. They were highly respected because they were the authorities on *vedas* and *agamas*.¹² They were fed by utilising the donations made for that purpose. Lands were granted by the kings and others for this purpose. The sacred food after offering to the deity was also used for feeding the Brahmins and pilgrims. Besides daily feeding on certain occasion and festivals the feeding of Brahmins was arranged in the temple. The temple resources were also spent for the inmates of the educational and other institutions attached to it. The land grants made to the temple under the period of study reveal the fact that the temple became popular and it paved the way for religious revival which continued even after the decline of the Cholas.¹³

1.2 Misappropriation of Grants

The maintenance of the grants was also equal to the donation. According to *dharmasastras* the act of maintaining and protecting the charity was a meritorious one.¹⁴ The act of maintaining and protecting was also considered as a pious and venerable one in almost all inscriptions. The seizer of the property of God was considered sin of one who kills 100 cows on the banks of the river

Ganga. In many cases the donor requested his successor and people to safeguard the endowment from any obstruction. Steps were taken by the government to protect the grants made over to the temple. The grants were properly recorded with the demarcation of clear boundaries. The grants were protected by the temple authorities as well as by the local administrators.¹⁵

Most of the lithic inscriptions and copper plate grants of the Pallava - Pandya age end with the statement *panmakesvara rakshai* and *srivaishnava rakshai*. The Panmakesvarar took care of the Siva temples and the Srivaishnavar of the Vishnu temples. Apart from this, donations have been left to the protection of *variyaaperumakkal* or the *tirumalaivirar* and *parantakavirar* who were the military guardians of the people.¹⁶

The Chola rulers took interest in the direct control of the temple and tried to control the management through an office called *srikariyam*. The communal management also continued during the Chola period. The grants of the local temple were placed under the protection of the Chola army *munrukai mahasenai*. A body composed of military officers and men function in purely civil action in respect of religious and other institution.

Fines and punishments were also fixed to those who misappropriated the resources and the donations made over to the temple. The periodical audit of the temple accounts and also visits by the officials were also made over by the government. Special officers were appointed from time to time to conduct the periodical audits of the temple properties. Madurantaka Gandaradittan, a royal officer appointed in 988 A.D by Rajaraja I. Tiruvadigal Sattan, a survey officer, worked during the period of Rajaraja I. Adikarigal solamuvendavelan, a special officer appointed during the period of Rajendra I. These are all the concrete steps taken by the Government to protect the property and grants of the temple. In spite of all this, there were some cases of misappropriation of temple properties.¹⁷

The word misappropriation means abuse of trust property or illegal acquirement of property. When the temple properties were misused or misappropriated by the officials, proper action was taken and people who found guilty were punished by the local authorities. Sometime royal orders were issued to insist the punishments.¹⁸

There are incidents of misappropriating charitable endowments during the reign of Rajaraja I. It was detected by the royal officials while auditing the temple accounts. A committee of five men headed by Madhurantaka Gandaradittan including adikarigal Villavan muvendavelan, Kadambankilavan Sivasekaran, Rajamarttanda muvendavelan, Mutti Paramesvaran enquired into the affairs of the temple of Agnisvara at Tirumalperu in the year 989 A.D. The committee found that tirukkoyiludaiyar (The staff of the temple) had neglected the endowments to the temple, reduced the daily offering to the deity to 2 nalis of rice and misappropriate the temple lands. The offenders were punished with fines and six pieces of land measuring two and a half veli were ordered to be resumed and taxes there on being paid to the Amman shrine in the temple.¹⁹

Madhurantaka Gandaradittan, a royal officer of Rajaraja I was at Tiruvallam noticed a similar defalcation in 992 A.D. He observed some defaults i.e., the offering presented to the God such as two *nalis* of rice, vegetables, ghee, curd etc., had been stopped and perpetual lamps were neglected. He called the Sivabrahmins of the temple and the members of the assembly to which the temple belonged and asked them to present the accounts of the temple with the royal order. He found that the Sivabrahmins had misappropriated the temple lands and he levied the Sivabrahmins 74 *kalanjus* of gold as fine.²⁰

When they were unable to pay the entire fine, he himself added seven *kalanjus* and five *manjadi* to make up the deficit. The full amount was deposited with the assembly of Jayameru Srikaramangalam, *devadana* and *brahmadeya* village of Tulunadu. The interest collected at the rate of 1/8 of a *kalanju* per annum was left with the Sivabrahmins of the temple for conducting certain festivals in *margali* (December) and providing sacred offering to the deity.²¹

Special officers were appointed to conduct periodical survey operations. Tiruvadigal Sattan, the survey officer, made an enquiry into the services conducted in the temple of Tirunombalur Mahadeva at Devanapalli, Somur, Trichy district in the year 1002 A.D. He detected certain malpractices and misappropriation of temple grants by persons who were in charge of the temple. Fines were imposed upon the persons who were involved in the misappropriation and out of these fines so collected gold plate was made and presented to the temple.

A royal order was issued by Rajaraja II giving more Judicial powers to the temple authorities of the Pasupatisvara temple at Panthanallur in Tanjore district. A Brahmin who had stolen the jewels of a goddess was compelled to give up his land as a *devadana* to the temple in the reign of Kulottunga III.²²

It shows that some of the Brahmins were not rich. They were not able to manage the lands which were endowed by the kings, they had to depend on others for cultivation. It may be the reason for their poverty so they stole the temple properties. The maintenance and protection of the grants was considered as an important one. Those who misappropriate the grants were severely punished and it was considered a sin.

1.3 Temple as a Cultural Centre

Temple became very popular from the 7th and 8th centuries with the development of the Bhakti movement. The Bhakti cult raised the status of god. The Bhakti cult spread a new awakening and contributed to the revival of Hinduism. The songs of the *nayanmars* and *alvars* spread a wave of devotionism and led to a spiritual awakening in the land.²³

Kings and wealthy men vied with each other in the construction of and endowments to temples. The golden age of Temple construction was the period of the Imperial Cholas. In due course, the temple became the pivot of the village. With the popularisation of temple worship by *nayanmars* and *alvars* its importance attained a great height.²⁴ The temple became not only a place of worship but also it focused the entire life of the people of a village. The temple of medieval times had a unique role as a landholder, consumer of goods and services, as an employer, as the focus of social life and development and it has proved to be a centre of culture.²⁵ Culture has intimate relation to social habits and customs, behaviour and moral and it has a direct bearing on the way of life as well as on the outlook on life. Temples have exercised great influence over the minds of the people. The temple became the centre of social life. It attracted the people. "Visit to the temple developed regularities in the behaviour externally and later internally". The devotees in a temple for worship are subject themselves to physical and mental discipline. Fasting on particular days or at specified times of certain special days serve as auxiliaries to discipline.²⁶

Temple provided facility for education. It is observed that education in South India in ancient and medieval period was basically religious in character. There are so many inscriptional evidences to explain about the educational services rendered by the temples. The temple and *mathas* provides facility for education. The temple was also centre for teaching vedic and classic lore. In many of the South Indian temples recitations and expositions of the epics and *puranas* took place.²⁷ The Pallava temple endowments record facilities for the reading of *Mahabharata* and a Brahmin scholar was appointed to recite the *Mahabharata*. There is also inscriptional evidence to show that the practice was in the temples at Tiruvorriyur, Ennayiram, Tirumukkudal and Tribhuvani.²⁸

The practice of singing sacred hymns from *Devaram* was prevalent during the later Pallava age. The temple endowments in the Siva temple at Tiruvallam, North Arcot district for the regular singing of the hymns. The practice of chanting *tiruppadigams* must have commenced as early as the reign of the Pallava king Vijaya Nandi Vikramavarman.²⁹ From the reign of Parantaka I numerous inscriptions speak of endowments made for the recitation of *tirupadigam* and *tiruvaymoli* by the Brahmins during the daily services in the temple. It was systematised by Rajaraja I who was a great organiser of the practices and celebrations in the South Indian temple. An epigraph of Rajendra chola I referred Tevaranayakam, an official and superintendent of *Devaram* recites.³⁰

Music and dance formed a part of the daily services with the advent of the Bhakti movement music and dance became part and parcel of worship. The devotional songs of *nayanmars* and *alvars* in praise of god are filled with music. The sons portrayed that the god is impressed with musical song and dance.³¹ The fine arts thrived well under the patronage of the temple. The temple became a great centre in encouraging the fine arts like music, dance, drama, sculpture and painting etc., Each and every temple maintained its own permanent staff of musicians both vocal and instrumental. The temples maintained a number of both male and female singers and recites of sacred texts. Female singers in the temple were known as *pendugal*. For the maintenance of dancers and singers land grants were made by the people.³²

We have an authentic evidence of dancing girls attached to the temples from the Pallava period onwards. An epigraph of Nandivarman II was the earliest

reference to the dancing girls attached with temple. During the Chola period, almost all the temples had dancing girls. The Rajarajesvara temple had 400 dancing girls attached to it. The dance masters were also maintained by the temple.³³

Drama was known in Tamil country even in ancient times. But the Pallava and Pandya inscriptions contain no information about dramatic performance in the temples. The later inscriptions mention about the promotion of drama by temples. Some of the temples had separate *natakasalai* within their premises. The dramas were mostly enacted on the occasions of important festivals. The play Rajarajesvara Natakam was enacted in the annual festival in the month of *vaikasi* (May). The best musicians, drummers as well as dancers were maintained by the temple.³⁴

The arts of architecture, sculpture in stone and bronze, iconography and painting also attained progress only in and through the temple. The temple provided ample employment opportunity to a large number of people. Large number of employees, irrespective of caste or creed were indulged in various categories of works. The people who engaged in the purely spiritual services, the people who were employed in the administration of the temple and those who were appointed to render various kinds of other services.³⁵

The temple was an instructive and cultural institution in which people from all walks of life found their places. Thus the temple in the medieval period proved itself to be a cultural centre.

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