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## SOCIAL CONDITION DURING THE CHOLA'S AS GLEANED FROM INSCRIPTIONS OF THIRUNAVALUR

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### ABSTRACT:

The history of Tamilnadu has many things to contribute to religion, art and culture. One may notice that national wealth is innumerable sacred and holy temples have been decorating the spiritual land of Tamils. Most of the temples contain valuable inscriptions which serve as the most authentic sources for reconstructing the ancient history. Among such ancient temples, the Thirunavalur temple is one of the few living South Indian temples with a rich past. Hence, the paper decodes such evidences.



**KEYWORDS:** Social conditions, Cholas, Inscriptions, Devaradiyar, Thirunavalur.

### INTRODUCTION

Among the many reputed towns of South India, a unique place is enjoyed by the Thirunavalur because of its hoary past spiritual and cultural greatness. It has also the rare distinction of having been one of the seats of the Chola power. Thirunavalur is situated at a distance of about 28 kms from Villupuram. On the Villupuram to Trichy National Highway, at the Gedilam junction. The temple is 12 kms from Panruti on the Panruti to Ulundoorpettai road and it is 15 kms from Ulundoorpettai. The temple is now called Bhaktajaneswara. This

Sanskrit name is represented in the inscriptions of the temple by its Tamil equivalent Thiruthondishwara. Both names refer to the 63 devotees of Shiva (Thiruthondishwara or Bhaktajaneswara), whose lives are narrated in the Periyapuranam. And one of whom is supposed to have been a chief of Thirunavalur itself. An inscription of the Chola king Paranthaka I. States that the stone temple of Thiruthondishwara was built by his son Rajadityadeva. Hence it is also called Rajadityeshwara in some of its inscriptions.

The inscriptions of the Cholas and their feudatories are found in the Thiruthondishwara temple of Thirunavalur. These are the primary source of reconstructing

the social condition and the cultural life of Thirunavalur region. Most of the epigraphs mentioned the endowments and gifts made in the form of lands, villages, jewel, lamps, etc. the donors mentioned in the inscriptions are mainly the rulers, feudal chiefs, the officials, the merchants the devaradiyars and the people.

### SOCIAL CONDITION

In the medieval period, temple played a significant role in the social life. The period and in fact, social life centers around the Thirunavalur. Temples were not only places of worship, but also a powerful social entity. The temples were corporations founded with the full co-operation

of the local peoples. The inscriptions found in the Thiruthondishwara temple in Thirunavalur describe the social structure of those days. They enjoyed a very large and devoted patronage from the ruling kings and their subordinates.

### CASTE SYSTEM

The society in the medieval Tamil Nadu was a caste – based one. The *Aryan Varansrama system* was accommodate to local conditions. The inscriptions from Thirunavalur reveal that conditions, the sub-castes sprouting from them the position of women, the role of women in the society. The endowments by a women in the temple and the status of dancers of those days.

### BRAHMANS

In Tamil nadu during the sangam age, there was work based division, but not the Caste – based division. During the pallava regime, the caste based divisions such as Brahmanas occupied an important place in Tamil nadu and became an integral part of Tamil Society since the 6<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. at least. It is also evident that some groups in Tamil Nadu, adopted the Brahmanical way of life and became Brahmanas. They were steeped in vedic studies and well versed in all sastras. They were respected and honoured by the people from all strata. They fully involved themselves in religious activities and interpreted *Vedas, Purana* and *Upanishadas*. in addition epic stories were also narrated to the common man.

Though they were a small fraction in the society, they enjoyed the support of the public and the king like Rajendra I following the invasion of the Gangetic plains brought with him *2000 Brahmin families* and helped them to vegetate in the Chola kingdom. This paved the way for their permanent settlement.

Brahmans for the most part, engaged themselves in the religious and education field. Special grants were also awarded for their settlements and these grants were called Brahmadeyam.

Devadana village Aviyanur, Mamandur, Kulakkudi, Manaduyanallur, Nallur, Muruttuvanpadi, Kolliyur, Tamittananllur, Katamber, Tagadi, Gunamangalam. The villages inhabited by the Brahmanas were called at Chaturvedimanagalam latter and it was known by various names. They were positioned at the top of the society and where help in great esteem.

The inscriptions of Thirunavalur illustrate *Brahamadeya* lands which were situated in *Chaturvedimanagalam* donated to the Brahmans were named after Kings, with the names of territories conquered and the queens. For example, *Rajaraja Chaturvedimangalam* and *Egatheerachathoor chaturvedimangalam* as born out the inscriptions of the temple.

### The Assemblies of Chaturvedimangalam

The administration of *Chaturvedimangalam* was looked after by sabha. As a member of the Sabhas the brahmanas played an important role in the polity. On the boards governed by these *Sabhas, Brahmanas were members*. The sabha was charged with the work of tax collection, exemption of the tax, administration of charitable endowment. maintenance of Thirunavalur was carried out by the sabhas of *Rajaraja Chaturvedimangalam* and *Aviyanur Mangalam, Egatheerachathoor chaturvedimangalam*, etc. is inscribed in the inscriptions of the Thiruthondishwara temple.

### Temple Servants

With the help of the inscriptions, we come to know about the servants of the Thirunavalur temple and the work turned out by them. arangansendan of akkavallam donated *500 kuli* of land in Tagadi as Devadana to Thiruthondishwara temple. The members of village assembly served the temple. The employees of the temple accepted the gift of *200 kuli* of wet land at *Gunamangalam* village as donation and agreed to keep the perpetual lamp burning.

Another records of Kulothunga II in his 14<sup>th</sup> regnal year shows that a gift of ten kalanju of gold deposited with Vadugankalaiyan Achchan for burning a perpetual lamp in the Thiruthondishwara temple.

### Vaisyas

The medieval commentators on the *Tolkappiyam* observes that trade was common to Vaisyas and Vellalas. They vaisyas belonged to mostly urban areas and the vellalas were by and a large rural community. Trade was carried on in land and international commerce by transporting their merchandise in carts on animals. the roads were conducive to local trade. Minor roads were called vali and major roads as Peruvali. there were overseas commerce during the Chola reign. People like *Nanadesikan, Disaiyairathu Ainootruvar, Valanjiar*, etc. engaged in overseas trade. The government patronized them to a larger extent and the trading community had considerable produce and production lands. They were rich and affluent and enjoyed comforts. They also devoted themselves to social service and enjoyed the good will of people. They were keen participants in renovation of temples running festivals and allied activities. from the inscriptions of this temple, one can learn that a trader of village by name *Thagadi* donated a perpetual lamp to this temple.

### Vellalas

The vellalas especially, the agriculturists were very important link of the society. In the middle age, they were the land-owning class and also members of the bureaucracy. This community was keenly interested in religious and charitable activities and attained a commendable status in the social hierarchy.

They were especially zealous in the renovation and maintenance of the temple and running festival. From the inscriptions, one can learn that Velan Aarooran, during the reign of Paranthaga, Rajaraja I, Rajendra I Chola kulottunga I were all huge land - owning men who made liberal endowments to the temple.

### Kaikolas

Another Community that helped during the middle age was the *Kaikola* caste. Though *Kaikolas* were weavers by calling, by and large, they formed the bulk of the army and distance forces. Land was given to them, as grants (manyam).

### Crimes and Punishments

#### Courts of Justice

Justice was very largely a matter of local concern and minor disputes were settled by one or another. However, as the king was the head of the State, he acted as the Supreme head of judicial administration too. The Dharmasanas were certain local courts in the outlying areas of the Kingdom which were empowered to dispense justice in the cases that arose within their jurisdiction. The village assemblies, the temple trustees and caste elders had these local courts which also had all the judicial and magisterial authority of the regular courts.

The committees of justice in the village assemblies were the *Nagarattar*. The *Dharma Sana* was perhaps the place where persons in charge of charitable endowments remitted fines due from them. An inscription is found on the north wall of the mandapa in front of the central shrine of Thirunavalur temple of Paranthaka Chola. The inscription is mutilated at the end of the lines.

An inscription found on the North wall of the mandapa in front of the central shrine of the Thiruthondishwara temple, during 4<sup>th</sup> regnal year of Pondya King Veerapondya dhevan. The inscription recorded a gift of 50 cows for bearing a lamp in the temple of Thiruthondishwaramudaiya mahadevar at Thirunavalur by one Kudaludiyar kulattan an sendan of kadambur. The donation was to atone for the death caused by him, to pichchan panam kandan of the same Village in quarrel, the relatives of the victim are said to have been consulted.

The first datable record is the time of the Mathiraikonda Parakesarivarman Paranthaka I in his 16<sup>th</sup> regional year. The inscription registers the gift of 400 sheeps for burning four perpetual lamps in the thiru thondishwara temple at thirunavalur.

An inscription is found on the north and west walls of the central shrine Thiruthondishwara temple during the 28<sup>th</sup> regnal year of Rajaraja I of the C.E. 1012-13 begins with introduction

*Tirumagalpola* etc. It records a gift of 10 *kalanju* of gold deposited with the *Urar* of palaippandal on the bank for a *perpetual lamp* in the temple by name *Angadiperman* for (the memory of) one piratti siralan of *Munaippadi Navalur*. The name for the gift is stated in the former's house in the night and tried to assault, his mistress in his very presence, by which he was enraged so much as to stab the intruder to death.

This records a gift of 32 *kasu* in memory of a lady by name *sendan Umaiyal*, for burying a perpetual lamp in the temple of *Tantonri Mahadevar* at *Valaiyur Rajedrapuram* by *malaiyaman kattimelurudaiyan plankuran kunran* of *Kugurppadi* in *Narippalli nadu* on the Southern bank. The gift is said to be in response to a demand made by the community *Nangudisai padinesbhumi Nanadesi* who held him responsible for the suicide of that lady by poison because of some threat held out by him with regard to tax due.

### POSITION OF WOMEN

In medieval, tamil nadu women constructed and endowed properties to temples. In an inscription at belonging *Thiruthondishwara* temple on a slab built the floor at the second entrance to *Paranthaka I* of the 34<sup>th</sup> regnal year 940 – 41, seems to have recorded the construction of a mandapa by *Virananiyar*. the consort of *Prince Gandaraditya and daughter* (in law) *Solamadeviyar* endowed *seventy kalanju of gold* for burning a *perpetual lamp* in *Thiruthondishwara* temple. A record mentions that *Kundavai pirati* donated gift of land to the temple.

### DANCING GIRLS

During the medieval period, the dancing girls held a high place, in the society, they entertained the public in all festivals of social importance with their dance and music. this system was called "Devadasi" and devadasi forms a unique class of employees in the temples of south India. they dedicated themselves to the service of the deity of deva of the temple, devadasis were dedicated to the temple by their parents. They were quite affluent and were devoted *Shivabaramis* as born out by the various acts of munificence done by them for the temple.

Woman engaged in service at the temples in dancing and music were known as "*devaradiyal*." Among them, those known as "*thalaikoligali*" were the leaders of the community. They rendered the noble service of lighting the sacred lamps, holy candles and garland making and their cultural services included reciting *devaram*, *thiruvagasam* and dancing.

There are totally four inscriptions in this temple which refer to *devaridiyars* and their donations, during the reign of *kulottunga III* a dancing girl by name *alagiya perumal* had donated a land to this temple to meet expenses of worship on the day of festival in the month of *purattasi*.

It is interesting to note that even the relatives of these dancing girls were also deeply interested in the upkeep of the temple, a record of *Kopperunjinga II* in 1256 C.E., refers to an instance of voluntary human sacrifice by *Atkondan* who was the younger brother of *perruli* who had cut off his head for the successful completion of *nriyamandapa* in the temple this shows the involvement and concern they had in the affairs of the temple.

Another damaged record states a gift of land made by the temple authorities to a *devaradiyal* by name *vinnappanigadial* for service in the temple. These records indicate that the *devaradiyars* were not only affluent but we're also dedicated to and interested in the welfare of the temple.

Thus, it may be seen that during the medieval period, that the exalted Brahmins, the *vaisyas* improved the economic conditions of the land by their flourishing commerce and the other caste men pursued varied works. Women enjoyed a certain amount of freedom, and contributed to the progress of the social conditions with their services to be temples through endowments.

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