



## DEVARADIYARS IN PUDUKKOTTAI DISTRICT

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### ABSTRACT

Temple worship was followed by certain Agamic traditions in both Saiva and Vaishnava temples in Tamil Nadu. Totally 16 types of offerings (Sodasa Upacharam) were offered to the God. Among these dancing in front of the temple premises was also included. Well trained dancers were appointed to perform various forms of dances and they were called as Santhi Kuthu, Sakkaikuthu etc. These trained dancers are named as Devaradiyar. The literal meaning of this term is one who serve to God. The term Devaradiyar means both men and women. Women devaradiyars are otherwise known as pathiyilar, Thaliyilar, Parikalathar, devadimai etc.

**KEY WORDS :** Temple worship , Thaliyilar, Parikalathar, devadimai.

### INTROCUPTION

Generally they had a prefix **Nakkan** with their name and suffix '**Manickaththal**'. In Cholanadu the well trained expert dancers were given the title '**Thalaikkoli**'. But in Pandya country they were given a title Kavithi, Kavithi Kanai Perral, Kavithi Kulunkavilai are mentioned in Thiruchuli inscriptions in Viruthunagar district.<sup>1</sup> These people had given other temple services like cleaning of the temple premises, maintaining temple gardens and garland making and ramming with cow dung the temple halls. They have properly paid for their services either by giving land, house sites, food cash or kind. They have played a prominent role in the temple oriented society. Their life and role in Pudukkottai district is discussed in this paper.

### KANI RIGHTS TO DEVARADIYAR: -

Devaradiyar had given Kanis for their services. But in some places they have purchased these kanis from their own money by public action too. The first evidence we got from Varappur Inscription.<sup>2</sup> In this record one devaradiyar Marunthi Andal by name is mentioned. She was attached with Thirukunrakudi Nayanar temple(Kunnandar Koil). She and another individual Thunanran Pillan alias Vikkrama Chola mi-polil nattu Velan jointly purchased certain lands and donated to Thiru Agathisvaram temple located at Varappur. Kudumiyanmalai inscription<sup>3</sup> dated to Maravarman Sundara Pandya who won Cholanadu (1237CE) reveals the land sale at Melmananallur by the Urar and the Sthanikas of Thiruvikrama Cholisvaram. They had jointly sold the land to one Devaradiyal Umaiyalvi Periyanchchi, a resident of Kudumiyanmalai. By this purchase of land this devaradiyar had entitled to enjoy the land with full rights. This land was sold to the value of 20 Kasu and 10 Kalam measure of Paddy.

So many Devaradiyars were living sophisticatedly with good income. So they were able to purchase the lands sold by the Urars and also liberally donated huge amount of money for the maintenance and well being of the temples. For example two instances are seen from Kudumiyanmalai inscription.<sup>4</sup>



During the days of Sadaiyavarman Virapandyan when he was staying at Karaiyur in Konadu, the Sthanikas of Kudimiyamalai temple met him and discussed with him about the provisions to be given to the goddess Aruvudaimalai mankai, which was built by the devaradiyar of this village Nachchi daughter of Durkkaiyandi. For the Pujas and renovation, certain lands located at Melmana nallur, and Kudimiyamalai Narpathennayiravan mutt etc were given as devadana and tax free land to this temple.<sup>5</sup>

In the next 2 years (ic) 13<sup>th</sup> regnal year in the same temple some other land sold was registered to some devaradiyar. Within two years the temple of Kudimiyamalai had met with some damage and the authorities took steps for its renovation. But they did not have enough money to do the renovation work. So, they had decided to sell the Thirunamatthukkani lands at Iluppaikudi tank and field and some other lands located in different villages to the same Devaradiyar Nachichi daughter of Durkkaiyandi<sup>6</sup> for the amount of 73000 Kasu. But this devaradiyal had handed over the whole amount to Adhichandesvara (temple steward/ accountant) as a donation to the temple.<sup>7</sup> All these continuous activities are elaborately recorded in three inscriptions at Kudimiyamalai temple.

During the eleventh regnal year of Sundara Pandya ( the exact identify is not known) Mayilappur Urar in Peruvayil nadu and the temple authorities of Agathisvaram had decided to sell some lands at SIRRATHAN KUDI devathana land to one devaradiyar Alagiya Varadar daughter of Kariyar who was attached with Thirupperumandar Koil. The land was sold to this devaradiyar for current 100 Varahan amount.<sup>8</sup> The same devaradiyal Alagiya Varadar had got another land located at SIRRATHAKUDI. The land was a devadama of Kulothunga Cholisvaram at SIRRATHAKUDI. It was sold by the temple authorities during the 10<sup>th</sup> regnal year of Sundara Pandya devar.<sup>9</sup>

One Seranur inscription dated to Kulasekara Pandya's 2<sup>nd</sup> regnal year mentions that certain lands at Kulothunga Cholisvaram was enjoyed by four individuals of that village. But from this area certain Konadan Kulam and field were sold in public auction by those individuals. This land was purchased by bidding in the auction by one Devaradiyal of Thirunalakkunram (Kudumiyamalai) Thiruvambalam Priyathal Alagiya Pendir.<sup>10</sup> By these foregoing evidences it is inferred that devaradiyars particularly in Pudukkottai region were wealthy and capable to purchase the lands in Public auction, private selling ect.

#### **Tax free lands to Devaradiyars:**

Although some devaradiyars were wealthy enough to purchase lands sold by individuals or by public auction, they were given tax free lands also for temple services by the kings or temple administrators. An inscription from Alaththur Agathis varamudaiyar temple mentions that one devaradiyar Alagapperumal daughter of Durkkaiyar attached with the Agathisvaram temple of this village had given tax free lands by the local people.<sup>11</sup> These lands were given to her for his variety of services and by them protecting the village. Devaradiyar were employed as cleaners of temple utensils in some places and lands were given as tax free for their services. An inscription from Sevalur Bhumisvarar temple dated to 1490 CE reveals that one devaradiyal doing this cleaning service was given lands and water tank for her services.<sup>12</sup>

Lands given to Devaradiyars were named as 'devadimaikkani, devadivayal etc. More over they were given house sites also for their residences in the Madavarvilakam streets. These had the right to sell or donate to temple these lands. So, they enjoyed these lands with all ownership rights.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Endowments for renovation works by Devaradiyars:**

Devaradiyars were engaged in not only in dancing, singing and cleaning of temple premises, but also they themselves donated money to install deities and newly built certain shrines and renovation works. Lands were also endowed by them for food offerings, cloth and other offering to the gods. For instance, one devaradiyal of Thirumananjeri temple Thillai Vanamudaiyal Mathavalli by name had installed chethirabalar deity during the Kulothunga Chola III period (1198 CE). Moreover she had endowed 500 Kasus in the temple treasury for regular food offering to this deity. The temple authorities had assured to follow regularly these services.<sup>14</sup>

During the days of the Vijayanakara king Virupanna Udaiyar son of Ariyana Udaiyar the walls of Kunrandar Koil were dilapidated due to some reasons. One devaradiyal of this temple Athanamalakiyar daughter of Nallapillai perral had donated to rebuilt these walls.<sup>15</sup> At Viralimalai temple one devaradiyal Valayi by name had installed Manickavasakar idol during 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>16</sup> Temple built by Nacchi daughter of Thukkaiyandi at Kudimiyamalai was already mentioned.<sup>17</sup>

#### Allotment of works for devaradiyars:

Certain by temples more than one devaradiyars were employed and they were allotted works on rotation. It is called as Adaivu or Murai. For example in Sundaracholisvaram Udaiyar temple in Kulathur totally seven adaivu (periods) were divided and for each adaivu 2 or 3 women were appointed for doing dancing, singing, putting holy dots (Arathi with red colour liquid made of lime and betel leaf) during Poojas and festivals. This arrangement was decided by the sthanikas and urars.

The first adaivu was given to murai Manickam and Chatru Kala manickam.

Second adaivu was allotted to Ammaiylvi Arputha Kuththa Manickam and Nachiyalvi villavathay Manickam.

Third adaivu was allotted to Sundara Manickam and her daughter kanavathi Kulothunga Chola Manickam, Pollatha Pillai Thiru gnana Sambantha manickam & koil manickam.

Fourth adaivu was given to Raja gambira manickam and pollatha Pillaiyana chola Kon Manickam.

Fifth Adaivu was given to Atkonda Manickam and Thiruchchirampala Manickam.

Sixth Adaivu was allotted to Ammaiylvi Thiruvennai Manickam and Thirukalirrupadi Manickam.

Seventh adaivu was given to Thirunirru chola Manickam and Kuththadu Nachi alias Thiru nadam Purintha Manickam.

So in such a way their appointments were duly are regularized to perform them without fail.

#### Various rights given to devaradiyars:

Devaradiyars were given several rights for their services such as tax free lands, house sites and preference in receiving Prasatham etc. Some devaradiyars were identification marks to denote which temple they were attached to serve.

At ponnamarapathy Vishnu temple during 1446 CE one dancing girl Sri Ranganayaki performed her dance recital at the temple hall. For this she was given Thiruvidayattam land one ma extent.<sup>18</sup> Temples had served as orphanages and given employment opportunities for the needy and poor people. At Ponnamarapathy Sundara raja perumal temple an interesting episode is recorded. During 1453 CE one devaradiyal Mallayi and her daughter Ulagudaiya nachi approached the temple authorities for their lively hood because of poverty and the temple authorities agreed to appoint them as temple servants of this Vishnu temple. These people had already served as devadimais but discontinued their services. They were identification marking impression for their previous service in the same temple. Verifying these markings they were appointed and their previous debts in the temple treasury were waived. For the new appointment Ulakudai nachchi was given two house sites, one ma extent of land as tax free. Her daughters Alagapperumal and Venkatam were given third adaivu and two house sites. One ma extent of land as tax free were given. Gents Ponnann and Thayumanan were appointed as velaikkarars and given 2 house sites and one ma extent of tax free land.<sup>19</sup>

#### Rangiyam inscriptions and Devaradiyars:

An inscription engraved at Bhumisvata temple at Rangiyam furnishes some interesting information's regarding Devaradiyars. During 1474 CE the Urar of Raja Singamangalam (Present day Rangiyam) had decided to appoint one devaradiyar lady since so far no devaradiyar was serving at this temple. So they appointed one Udaiyammai as devadimai and given the name Naluthikkum venra Manickam (one who conquered four directions). Then she was given first adaivu right and donated kani extent of land with due water right and house site was also allotted in the temple lands.

During 1512 CE one interesting argument was noticed by an inscription found at Bhumisvara temple at Rangiyam. Previously appointed devaradiyar Alagiya Meni by name was migrated with her children and settled at the Velankudi temple. By searching various places, Rangiyam Urar identified them at Velankudi temple and claimed them to come back and serve at Rangiyam temple. But the authorities of Velankudi temple suggested to have them half month here and half month there. Rangiyam people did not agree for this arrangement and by identifying their trident mark on their body they compelled them to serve at Rangiyam temple.<sup>20</sup> Devaradiyar Meni and her children were appointed as 3<sup>rd</sup> and fourth adaivu servants. By these evidence it is known that devaradiyar who served in Siva temples were put with trident symbol on their body whereas who served in Vishnu temple had a mark of conch. Devaradiyars had the right to bequeath their profession to their own herds or to award them to their blood relatives if not have the issues on their own. It is also known from a record from Rangiyam.<sup>21</sup>

Perumandal Thaiyali, a Velaikara devaradiyar of Rangiyam Bhumisvarar temple had no issues to her own. But she adapted two girls namely Malaichi and Oyyal and handed over her right of devadimai profession for these two girls. She also parted one third of her property to her blood brother Chitambaranathan. So, it is assured that the devaradiyars once got land rights can sell, mortgage or bequeath it to whom so ever he or she wished. It is accepted by the Urars and temple administrators also.

### Devaradiyars as dancers:

One among the professions allotted to Devaradiyars is dancing before the god and goddesses on special occasions. One Vikkirma Chola's record from Thiruvengaivasal reveals that during Chittirai festival one dancer was appointed to perform SanthiKuthu. Her name was Elunattu Nangai and she was ordered to perform 9 kinds of Kuththu. For this profession she was endowed with lands.

In the same village Thiruvengkavasal during the days of Rajathi raja Chola one more dancer Santhikuththu Nachchi Umaiylvi alias Sathira Vitanka Nangai was appointed by one Araiyan Sathiran alias Kulothunga Chola Kidaratharaiyan. She was appointed to perform dance on the Vaikasi Thiruvathirai festival and she has to perform six variety of Kuthu's on that day. For this land and paddy were donated to the dancer.<sup>22</sup>

### Devaradiyar – a separate community or not:-

Obviously it is stated that devaradiyars were a separate community who were well versed in dancing and singing. But it is not so. Evidences can be had from Pudukkottai inscriptions other working class people also engaged in devaradiyar profession. For example kammalas and Kaikolas also dedicated their ladies to serve as devaradiyars in some temples.

At the beginning devaradiyar profession was considered as a noble one (ie) serving for the god. They had good status in the society and prosperous in their life to purchase lands, donate them and even capable to built temple on their own. But later on their status was degraded and became menial laborers. For example we can trace evidence from Malaiyadipatti Vaheesvarar temple inscription.<sup>23</sup> one Avudaiyathevan at Pusakkudi village had an illegal contact with a devaradiyar at Thirunedunkalam. One Particular day when Avudaiyathevan Knock the door of that devaradiyar girl, another one Brahmin was with her inside the house. Irritated and anguished Avudaiyathevan immediately killed both the Brahmin and the lady but he lost his eyes for that sin. By donating his landed property to the temple of Vahisvarar he got back his eye sight. It is a miracle. But it shows the degraded life of Devaradiyars in the later days.

### CONCLUSION:

About 36 inscriptions are noticed in Pudukkottai region regarding the life and profession of Devaradiyars. They range from 11 to 18<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the devaradiyars had dedicated their life fully to the services of god. They had donated liberally for various offerings and even built certain shrines and install certain idols on their own. They were well versed in singing and dancing. They lead a rich and wealthy life. They were also appointed for menial works of the temple also.

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