



CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE CHOLA PRINCE AND PRINCES TO THE TEMPLES OF CHIDAMBARAM REGION

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ABSTRACT

Chidambaram is one of the most ancient and most celebrated shrines in India. It is of great religious as well as historic and cultural significance. Chidambaram is associated with Nataraja, or Shiva in his Ananda Tandava pose (the cosmic Dance of bliss) in the golden ball and the hall of consciousness. Shiva is also worshipped in the "Formless form" of the Chidambaram Rahasyam, while the temple is known for its Akasa Lingam, an embodiment of Shiva as the formless space.

KEYWORDS: *historic and cultural significance , Akasa Lingam.*

INTRODUCTION

The word "Kovil" or temple in the Tamil saivite tradition refers to none other than the Chidambaram Nataraja Temple.¹ It is the abode of the cosmic Dancer Sri Nataraja Temple is one of the oldest temples of the Chola Period.

CHIDAMBARAM IN CHOLA TIMES

Though the names of some of the kings are repeatedly mentioned in several inscriptions, there are three inscriptions which give us the names of three Chola princesses—Kundavi, Ammangai and Madurantaki. The first of these princesses is called "Rajarajan Kundavi - the younger sister of Kulottunga-sora-deva (or Rajendra Sora-deva)" and may be identified with Kundava,² the daughter of Rajaraja; the second princess is referred to as Ammangai, the daughter of Kulottunga-sora-deva³ and is identified with Ammangadevi who married Rajaraja I; the third princess is referred to as "Madurantaki, the younger sister of our Lord (Kulottunga Sora-deva)." One of the inscriptions of Virarajendra, the predecessor of Kulottunga I tells us that he presented a fine ruby called Trailokyasara for being mounted on the crown of Dancer of the Golden Hall. The mediaeval Cholas whose inscriptions are found in the temple are Kulottunga I, Vikrama Chola, Kulottunga III and Rajaraja III.

One of the most interesting events of the temple frequently referred to in the inscriptions of the period is the work of covering the temple with gold, and this is claimed by various kings. According to the Leyden Grant, Parantaka I (A.D. 907-948) covered the Siva temple at Chidambaram with gold;⁴ and the credit of this is claimed for Kunduvani.⁵ Parantaka I's the small hall (Dabhra Sabha) which is a translation of Tamil Sirmambalam) of Siva at Chidambaram is referred to in verse 53 of the Tiruvalangadu plates.⁶ Though tolerant of all religions in his dominions he is known to have followed the Saiva creed, as he utilised all the booty he acquired in his wars in covering with gold the temple at Chidambaram. We may refer in this connection to Gandar Aditya's Tiruviasippa on Koyil.⁷ But there are no inscriptions of Parantaka I in the temple itself to commemorate the achievements which are claimed for him.

Vikrama Chola, the son and successor of Kulottunga I who though crowned king in A.D. 1118, was practically the ruler during the latter part of the reign of Kulottunga I, is said to have covered the temple with gold. The Kulottungan solan-Ula, a Tamil poem composed in honour of Kulottunga II says that Kulottunga II covered the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram with gold. On the other hand, the Rajarajan-Ula, another Tamil poem composed in honour of Rajaraja II, the son of Kulottunga II claims the act for its hero.

An inscription, from Tiruppalaivanam⁸ refers Tribhuvana Chakravartin Kulottunga Chola who covered with gold the temple at Perambalam (Chidambaram). Another record⁹ from the same place begins with the words 'Tirupperambalam-pon- Veindaruliya' Rajakesari Varman. Both these inscriptions are attributed to Kulottunga Chola II whose claim to have covered with gold the temple at Chidambaram is known through other epigraphic¹⁰ and literary references.

On the other hand, there are two inscriptions of Vikrama Chola¹¹ which attribute this pious work to him. In fact, in an introduction of Vikrama Chola beginning with the words 'Pumalaimidaindu¹² this pious act is claimed by him- Another record 350 of 1927) claims the act of covering the Ponnambalam i.e. Chidambaram temple with gold (sheets) for Tirubhuvanachakravartin Kulottunga-Chola. Probably Vikrama-Chola actually performed the act while Kulottunga II merely adopted the title. Sekkilar in his Periyapuram mentions that Anapaya gilded the Chidambaram temple. Anapaya is known to be the surname of Kulottunga II and he had also pretensions to this meritorious deed. Thus the work of covering the temple with gold is claimed by various kings. But as a matter of fact some of the Devaram hymns which belong to an earlier date refer to the temple as *செம்பொன்கலில் எழுதிமேய்ந்த சிற்றம்பலம் பொன்னம்பலம்*. Which Chola king had the better right to claim to himself the gilding of the temple is a question to which no conclusive answer can be given. But what is more important is that the way in which this event is recorded in Tamil literature and epigraphical records serves to establish the succession of Chola kings during this period.

An inscription on a pillar¹³ in the outermost prakara to the north of the east gopura in the Nataraja temple now fixed in the outermost east prakara states that the mandapa (which must have contained this pillar) was constructed by Akalankan i.e. Vikrama-Chola. The benefactions of this king to the temple are described in the historical introduction commencing with the words Pumalai midaindu perfacng his inscriptions wherein God Nataraja is extolled as his family deity.¹⁴ We know from inscriptions that the tirumaligai in the north side of the second prakara of the Chidambaram temple, the west entrance leading into the same prakara and the 100-pillared mandapa were constructed during his time and the broken pillar may have belonged to any of these structures or to a different construction altogether of "which we" have no knowledge now.

Recent researches have brought to light the doings of the remarkable Chola chieftain, Naralo-kavira in the days of Kulottunga I and his son Vikrama Chola.¹⁵ He is described by many names and titles in his inscriptions, such as Kalingaraja, Sabhanataka, Manavatara, Arulakara, Naralokovira. etc. There are about a dozen inscriptions bearing' on the life and work of Naralokaviran, and one of his inscriptions is found in Chidambaram. While most of his inscriptions make it appear that he was a mighty warrior, the inscription at Chidambaram shows that he used his great position and influence in the state in the service of religion. The most notable of his structures in Chidambaram on behalf of his master Vikrama-Choladeva was; the hall with a hundred pillars. A record¹⁶ from' Chidambaram in Tamil verse contains a catalogue of gifts made to the Nataraja temple.

The next Chola ruler whose works at Chidambaram are of more of than ordinary interest; is Kulottunga II, the son and successor" of Vikarma Chola. In one inscription it is claimed that he was the king who wore the crown is such wise as to add lustre to Tillainagar¹⁷ Kulottunga II's renovation of the temple is attested both by inscriptional records of his seventh year and literary works. A detailed account of the remodelling of the temple by Kulottunga II is given by Kulottunga-solan-ula and he is said to have constructed gopurams with seven tiers and the shrine of the goddess, and the various parts of the temple are said to have been covered with gold. Another famous Chola whose inscriptions of the temple are helpful is Kulottunga III (1178-1216). The latest date of Kulottunga III is the 39th year in a manuscript at Chidambaram.¹⁸ Kulottunga III is known by other names Virarajendra-solan-deva was one of his names and

we learn from inscriptions of the temple that he was called Virarajendra-deva.¹⁹ The records of the reign of Kulottunga-III are numerous. Four inscriptions²⁰ of the Chidambaram temple relating to Kulottunga III are of particular interest. Of these two relate to the 5th year and two to the 9th and 11th year respectively. All these inscriptions have a historical introduction, but the historical introduction of the inscriptions of the 5th year does not contain any statement of historical interest. The inscriptions of the 9th and 11th years contain statement of historical interest. The inscription of the 9th year relates, how Kulottunga III assisted Vikrama-Pandya against the son of Vira-Pandya, defeated the 'Marava army, drove the Sinhalese army into the sea, and took Madurai (Madura) from Vira-Pandya and bestowed it to Vikrama Pandya. The inscription of the 11th year refers to the defeat of the son of Vira Pandya and to the bestowal of Kudal on Vikrama Pandya and adds that Vira-Pandya revolted again, but that Kulottunga III took his crowned head. Chidambaram is referred to in this inscription as Perumbarrapuliur in Rajadhirajan Valanadu and the temple as Tiruchchirrambalam-udaiyar.

Kulottunga-Chola III is again represented by three inscriptions from Chidambaram. Two of these²¹ with the introduction Puyalvayattu etc. and in 'his 7th year call him Virarajendra deva. The inscription from Chidambaram gives some interesting glimpses of land transactions associated with their grant to the temple. In one of these²² two persons Vijayarajan of Velur in Rajendrasola-Valanadu, Ponnnamudan of Sirkudi in Uyyakondar-valanadu purchased some plots of land for forming a flower-garden to the temple in four villages from the mulaparishad of Perumbarrapuliur in the name of a certain Kavusiyan Mahesvaran Kumaran of Mitunikkudi. These lands comprised two kinds, taramperra (assessed) and taramili or alavilingal (not assessed). The taramili lands were utilised for guhai for the tapasvins and as site for the flower-garden. The former kind, viz. those entered in the accounts as assessed lands from which taxes were being realized by the assembly hitherto, were endowed by the donors for the upkeep of the-garden, and on their petition to the king, the taxes due thereon were henceforth remitted and so entered in the accounts of Varikku-Kuruseyvan (assessing officer?). The four tenants looking after the flower-garden were also exempted from the Kudimai taxes. All the concerned documents were to be deposited in the temple treasury. This document was issued over the signature of eight officers under the orders of the king. Almost the same kind of transaction is recorded in an epigraph²³ dated a few months later and in another epigraph²⁴ dated in the 11th year of Kulottunga-Chola-deva. In all these transactions the lands were purchased by the donors not in their own names from the original owners nor in the name of the temple to which the endowment was made but in the name of some entirely different individual. The reason for this procedure is not clear from the contents of the inscriptions it is interesting to note that among the owners mentioned in the records from whom the lands were purchased by the donor figures a certain Damodiran Irundanarayana-Bhattan of Maringur who is referred to as a teacher (or purohita?) depending upon the village for his maintenance, (gramasrayam-irukkumuvatti).

According to the information in some of the epigraphs about the building operations of Kulottunga III²⁵ we learn that he built the 'mukha-mandapa of Sabhapathi and gopura of the shrine of the goddess Girindraja and the enclosing verandah (Prakaraharmya). These references are to the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram, where the king must have built the 'mukha-mandapa' the 'gopura' of the shrine of the goddess Sivakami Amman and the verandah enclosing the central shrine. Kulottunga III is also described as an unequalled devotee (ekhabakta) of the God at Chidambaram.

Of Rajaraja III, there are several inscriptions from Chidambaram. One of them²⁶ registers an endowment for a flower garden to the god after its purchase from the Mula-parishad of Perumparrapuliur by Somanatha Deva *alias* Udaiyur Svami Devar Sandilya-gotra who hailed from the Uttaragrahara in Uttara-rashtra of Uttarapatha. The donor is referred to at the end of the inscription! in respectful terms and hence he seems to have been a very influential person at the time and probably the religious head of some matha at the place. Rajaraja's other inscriptions record mostly gifts of lands made after purchasing them temple at Chidambaram which was made tax-free by order of the king. One of the records²⁷ mentions certain lands which were in the enjoyment of Velichcheri Savarnan Gautaman Svami Kumaran Arulabhattachan alias

Savarna—Chakravarthi of Uttamasolamangalam in Rajadhiraja-valanadu from the 12th year of the king and which was now purchased from his sons by certain lady for being endowed to the temple.

CONCLUSION

Thus we see that the rulers of Chola dynasty were not merely conquerors and commanders but they also had a love for art and literature. They patronized the artists and scholars and gave libered donations to religious centres. They put in their best efforts to spread education with their fine administration based on the principle of decentralization. They tried to give a democratic touch to their despotic rule.

END NOTES

1. Revathy Girish, Architectural Tourism, Dominant Publishers & Distributors (P) Ltd., New Delhi, 2013, p. 163.
2. Epigraphic Indica, Vol. IV, p. 302; Ind. Antiquary Vol. XIV p. 50.
3. South Indian Inscriptions, Vol. IV No. 226.
4. Archaeological Survey of India, Vol. IV, p. 208.
5. Epigraphic Indica, Vol. V, p. 105.
6. “தென்னாடும் ஈளமும் கொண்டதிற்றார் செங்கோர் சோழன்
கோழி வேந்தன் செம்பியன் பொன்னுனிந்த..... தில்லையம்பலத்து”.
7. A.R. E. 349 of 1928-29.
8. A. R. E. 315 of 1928-29.
9. A. R. E. 350 of 1927.
10. A. R, E. 165 of 1894 and 82 of 1895.
11. A.R.E. 160 of 894 and S.I.I. Vol. V, p. 227.
12. A. R. E. 109 of 1935.
13. The Cholas by K. A. Nilakanta Sastri Vol. II (Pt. I), pp.65, 66.
14. A.R.E. 1922 p. 115; K.A. Nilakanta Sastri—Studies in Chola History and Administration.
15. A.R.E. 120 of 1888,
ஷஷதில்லையில் பொன்னம் பலத்தைச்
செம்பொநால் - மெதுவர் நெல்லை
யைப் பொபந் நாக்கி
நூற்றுக் கால் மண்டபத்தே
தில்லைய பிரானுக்கு செய்தமைத்தான்
.....
புட்கானிகல் சாத்து வித்தான்
வீதிசூழ் நல்விளக்கிம் விளக்கம் வீற்றிருக்க
மண்டபமும் மாது சூழ்.
பாதமும் மகுழ் தொர்க்கும், பொதுசூழ் தில்லைக்கெ செய்தான்”
16. A.R.E. 155 of 1902 .
17. S.I.I. Vol. III—Part I (1899) p. 43.
18. S.I.I. Vol. III, p. 205.
19. A.R.E. 121 of 1888: 122 of 1888: 457 of 1902; 458 of 1902.
20. A.R.E. 3 and 4 of 1936.
21. A.R.E. 3 of 1936.
22. A.R.E. 4 of 1936.
23. A.R.E. 7 of 1936.
24. A.R.E. 190, 161 and 192 of 1908.
25. A.R.E. 9 of 1936.
26. A.R.E. 8 of 1936.
27. A.R.E. 2 of 1929.