



## DRESS AND ORNAMENTS OF DEVADISIS IN TAMIL COUNTRY

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### ABSTRACT :

The word Devadasi means a servant of slave of God and she was dedicated to God's for external service. Devadsis were popularly known as dancing girls, because their chief duty was to dance in front of the idols during processions and poojas. These devadsis seem to have held a considerable position in Tamil Nadu. Devadasi was married to the immortal, she was hailed as a Nityasumangali 'ever auspicious female'. Tradition holds that on her death no worship was conducted in the Temple. The inscriptions and literature of the Cholas provide ample for sketching the history of the Devadasi system. The Devadasis, though performed multifaceted works, they were entirely converged towards cultural and spiritual services. It is clearly known that their lives lay in two strata. Those who were in the upper stratum, lead prestigious life having been paid grants-in-aid with honours and privileges. During the Medieval period and even in the beginning of the Vijayanagar period dedicating women to Temple service was considered respectable. The Nayanmaras and the Alvars praised the dancers in glowing terms in their hymns while visiting and relating to different shrines in Tamil Nadu.

**KEYWORDS :** dancing girls , external service , glowing terms.

### INTRODUCTION

The word Devadasi means a servant of slave of God and she was dedicated to God's for external service. Devadsis were popularly known as dancing girls, because their chief duty was to dance in front of the idols during processions and poojas. These devadsis seem to have held a considerable position in Tamil Nadu. Though the origin of the system is not known, we find reference to them in the inscription and Tamil Literature during the medieval period.

### The term referred to the inscription :

Women who is associated with temple activities or who claim relationship with God or one who claims herself as the servant of God has been attributed the terminology ' Temple Women. The inscription furnish sufficient information to distinguish these types of women. The term referred to the inscription for the Temple Women are **Talichcheripendugal, Devaradiyar, Devanarmagal, Taliyilar, Patiyilar, Emperumanadiyar, Patiyar Taliyilal, Patiyilal, Koyilpillaigal** (children of temple) and so on.<sup>1</sup>



The term '**Talaikoil**' i.e., found attached to the names of the Temple women. The earliest record belonging to the 9<sup>th</sup> century mentions the term **Devanarmagal** and **Devaradiyar** these are used in Tamil inscription. The two components of the word **Devaradiyar** in the Chola inscription cannot be interpreted to mean the slaves, but on the other hand they enjoyed a ritually high status. This indicated by the way in which they have been treated in the temple.<sup>2</sup>

A wide range of terms is applied to Temple Men; the inscriptions mention *Sivabrahmanas*, *Srimahesvams*, *Vaikhanasas*, *Tevarkanmikal* (temple servant) *Kanakkar* (accountants), Manratis (shepherds), *Uvaccar* (drummers), *Taccar* (carpenters) and *Areciahar* (priests), among others. Thus the definition of a Temple Man does not enter on around a set of particular terms, as is indicative of the heterogeneous character of this group. Temple men are much more frequently mentioned than temple women in Chola period inscription.<sup>3</sup>

Temple women's were perpetuating a particular ideology and understanding the complexity of the women's situation in terms of oppression, within a patriarchal structure. These Temple girls, commonly referred as Devadasis in popular literature were dedicated to the Temple and performed sacred duties they have become an object of reminiscences of the past.<sup>4</sup>

They contributed donations to Temples like others used to do. The inscriptions of the Chola and later period furnish detailed information about the various of acquiring the women by temple. The dancing girls were either purchased or dedicated or presented by somebody to the service of the Temple. ***The led on unmarried life and were not permitted to marry.*** Some times they were transferred from one Temple to another at the order of the king.<sup>5</sup> In Tamil society too, they were equally treated with others. They contributed donations to Temple like others to do.

### DEVADASI DANCERS:

The dancing girls generally occupied a respectable position in the society. Their dress consisted of Saree, Pyjama bodice, skirt and a weep. Their saree was bedecked with golden thread and tinsel. The Devadasis performed certain duties in the Temples and in recognition of their services they were paid some rewards which varied from Temple to Temple and from time to time.<sup>6</sup> In certain respects nature of their duties decided their status in the Temples as well as the duties of Devadasis of Rajarajesvaram were akin to those enjoined on their counterparts in other Temples. Rajaraja I's inscription of C.E.1014 specifies singing and dancing as their daily duties.<sup>7</sup>

The Devadasis of Saivite Temples recited the hymns (Tiruppadiham, i.e. Devaram, Tiruvacagam and Tiruvempavai). The Emperumanadiyar of Vaisnavite Temples recited hymns from Divyaprabandham, Devadasis were also entrusted with the duty of looking after the flower gardens (tirunandavanam), in the Temples. It is learnt that the Devadasis took part in dramatic performance in temple also. Some, Temple even had Temples of dramatists perhaps including some Devadasis. Dramas were enacted during the annual festivals in Temples. An inscription records that Rajendra I made endowments in C.E. 1056 to enact the Rajarajesvara Drama in Rajarajesvaram at Tanjore.<sup>8</sup>

### DRESS AND ORNAMENTS :

The dancers applied the paste of the gooseberry and Kasthuri on their threads, Later they bathed and then they warmed their hair with Akirpukuri. Then they spread the hair and de-knotted the hair – knots with their nails. It was after this fact smeared Karpuram powders, they plaited their dark hair with the flowers. Kalunirmalar and also Kuvallaitatai. On the divisions on the hair they added beautiful small flower garland, pearl garland, brad garlands and different kinds of decoration in their respective places of the body.<sup>9</sup> The hair- do was just put into a knot or ball. The knots were either at the back of the head or side-wise. Only a few of them plaited their hair into a lengthy manner, decorated in with flower garlands, applied 'Kasthuri' and danced with a sweet odour wafting around them. From sculpture it is understood the head ornaments were in use. They were the Tayyakam, Purapalai, Pulakam and Sulamani, Thoiyaham is appended to a series of chains and is matched with the hair – dress.<sup>10</sup> The series of chains are known as Thoyiham and 'Seethevi' is a part of Thoyiham. It is also known as Ilambaham. This is understood from the line in – 'Seevaha sinthamani' Aranga Ani Nadaga Magalir, Ayanoothal Ilambagam'. These head ornaments are found in Kumbhakonam, Nagesvara temple and the dancing girl's paintings of the Cholas.<sup>11</sup>

Different kinds of ear ornaments are seen in the sculptures. Among them *Kudombai and Kuzhai* are significant. In the bore of the ear, that has been allowed to grow the roll of the Palmira leaf, and

inserted which is known as **Kudumbai**. This is also called **Patrakundalam**. Instead of the Palmira leaf the golden leaf was also used '**Seevaha sinthamani**'<sup>12</sup> talks of golden leaf Sempon. The ear ornaments know as **Kuzhai and Kundalam** are also found in the sculptures. The books on sculptures introduce three types of '**Kundalams**' they are **Simakundalam, Vijalakundalam** fashion **Makarakundalam**. Among these the Makarakundalam fashion in the model of the Mahara fish is found in the sculptures. Among the sculptures found in the Pullamankai and Melaperumpallam Temples some of them bear the Makara Kundalam. Distinctively enough in the dancing posture of Siva Makara Kundalam is present.<sup>13</sup> Along with the Makara Kundalam there were the ear-rings that positioned in the ears of the dancing ladies. Sinthamani speaks of the **Kundalam** that looked like the Indiravil (rainbow). During the reign of the Cholas, the lady dancers were this katipo with great delight is know from the sculptures in the Kumbakonam Nageshwarar Temple and Melaperumpalla Valampuranathar temple. The female dancers of the Chola period danced wearing neck ornaments made of gold and precious stones.<sup>14</sup> The most important ones are **Kandikai, Chavadi, Cherapali, Maniyaram, Muttaram** and gold chain with the **Patakkam**. Since the three neck ornaments like the Kandikai, Charapali and Chavadi were found in the sculptures in the Chola period, it be known, that the dancers worn there ornaments. The sculptures in the Melaperumpallam Valampurinathar temple prove that the female dancers wore long slender pearl chains. The epic '**Sinthamani**' talks about the different types of neck ornaments worn by the dancers.<sup>15</sup> They were ornaments like **Pumalai** red coral chains made of **Sempon**, chains studded with sparkling beads, chaine embedded with precious stones and pearl chains.

### SCULPTURE

In the sculptures of the Chola period the dancers are found wearing Kadavalai, Tolvalai, hand bangles, Pariagam and finger rings. In the sculptures on the griva of the Vimana of Tirsenturai Chandrasekhara Temple a female dancer is seen wearing finger-rings. Another sculpture of a lady dancer bears the finger-rings in Tenneri Sivan Temple.<sup>16</sup> The Sinthamani elaborates about the varied types of finger-rings worn by the female artist. The waist ornaments were utilized in two ways. They not only enhance the beauty of the waist, but also tighten the dress worn around the waist. The two waists ornaments are Mekalai and Araipatikai. The Sinthamani speaks of the Mekalai worn by the female dancer.<sup>17</sup>

The Sinthamani lists out the ornaments worn around the legs of the female dancers. Thirukailaya Gnanalla identifies the ornaments worn by the lady dancers. Among them the Paiyakam was one-third of the breadth of Cilampu. This would be joined with chains to the leg-finger rings. This significant ornament of the ladies of the Chola period was rare. Ornaments that are found in the sculptures literatures were wrought in valuable beads, pearls, gold and silver as is known from the inscriptions.<sup>18</sup> Among them a few inscriptions at Rajarajesvaram and a few of the inscriptions on the ornaments namely **Araipattikal** of different types were donated in those days to the godly figures. The designing technology is known from the inscriptions of the twenty-ninth year of the rule of Rajaraja I.<sup>19</sup>

### PERFUMES AND COSMETICS

There were beauticians who made the make-up according to the rulers given in the books. It was significant following their guidelines and also due in their experience. The art of beautifying and the efficiency of the beauticians are well gold in the **Sinthamani**. Almost with the smearing of the body with sandal paste (**catanam**) there was the custom of writing on the shoulders and the part ions of the breasts. The fragrant powder was smeared all over the body.<sup>20</sup> The powder made of the pollen oil to the flower was also smeared to give a pleasant odour. They applied oil to the hair and plaited the hair or else they heaped the hair together and made it into a knot. Different kinds of flowers made into garlands. Flowers like **Kongam, Konrai, Vengai, Kuvilai, Mallikai, Talai, Canpakam** were employed to adorn the head. Inside the hari the leaf of the flower Kulavai was inserted.<sup>21</sup> The inscriptions of the Chola period inform that the artists who performed the Kuttu spread the body with the rice flour, mai and oil and turmeric powder. The inscription in **Tiruvialur Pitcha Thevar Temple**, it also says that the committee ordered for the celebration

of the temple and provide needed for the make-up materials for those who perform kuttu and for the musicians.<sup>22</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Devadasi was married to the immortal, she was hailed as a Nityasumangali 'ever auspicious female'. Tradition holds that on her death no worship was conducted in the Temple. The inscriptions and literature of the Cholas provide ample for sketching the history of the Devadasi system. Delving deeply into the system of Devadasis, one can easily bring all matters as greenery scenes in the screen even a frizzle of facts without falling down. The Devadasis, thought performed multifaceted works, they were entirely converged towards cultural and spiritual services. It is clearly known that their lives lay in two strata. Those who were in the upper stratum, lead prestigious life having been paid grants-in-aid with honours and privileges. Whereas those in the low stature less paid and did manual works for daily allowances. During the Medieval period and even in the beginning of the Vijayanagar period dedicating women to Temple service was considered respectable. The Nayanmaras and the Alwars praised the dancers in glowing terms in their hymns while visiting and relating to different shrines in Tamil Nadu.

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