

THE TEMPLE CONSTRUCTIONS UNDER THE PALAYAKARS AND ZAMINDARS IN DINDIGUL REGION

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Abstract

The Nayak period in Tamil Nadu and the dawn of Palayakars witnessed the construction of new temples and renovation and reconstruction of ruined temples with additional structures. In the Poligars and Zamindars period the worship takes a new form. The reconstruction and consecration of old temples and construction of new temple followed stipulated rules. The raise of palayams witnesses the consecration of new temples. Religion played an important part in the culture of the individuals and society. Religion exercised an abiding influence on the people and moulded their culture. In this culture analysis different creators have moved toward the effect of religion on Tamil society from days of yore right up 'til today continuously in a scholarly way. Chronological religious experiences of Tamils based on the progressive thoughts had been assessed and documented with reference to Dindigul region.

Keywords: Nayaks, Palayakars, Zamindars, Temple study, Vaishnava temples

Introduction

Hinduism is one of the oldest living religions of the world.¹ Hinduism does not have a single common founder. It is formed of diverse traditions called *Sanathana Dharma* and spread over a large territory. It has the amalgamation of ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity. The cultural and ethnic diversity of the adherents of Hinduism resulted in an enormous variety of traditions.² Hinduism is also the most complex of all living religious in the word. Though there are several sects in Hinduism, *Vaishnavism* and *Saivism* are the two major divisions of Hinduism. They became predominant due to a large following and the royal patronage.³

The *Nayak* period in Tamil Nadu and the dawn of *Palayakars* witnessed the construction of new temples and renovation and reconstruction of ruined temples with additional structures. The advent of *bhakti* movement in Tamil Nadu inculcated a spirit of renaissance in the fifth and the ninth centuries AD. This movement gave impetus for *Vaishnavism* in the form of *Bhajan* halls in village levels. These *Bhajan* halls in many places have assumed as *Bhajanaikkoils*, and then new temples have been constructed in their places. The *Nayak* period in Tamil Nadu and the dawn of *palayakars* witnessed the construction of new temples and renovation and reconstruction of ruined temples with additional structures. The advent of *bhakti* movement in Tamil Nadu inculcated a spirit of renaissance in the fifth and the ninth centuries AD.

Construction under the Poligars and Zamindars

In the *Poligars* and *Zamindars* period the worship takes a new form. The reconstruction and consecration of old temples and construction of new temple followed stipulated rules. *Sri Soundararaja Perumal* temple has the patronage of *Nayak* rulers, *Poligars* and *Zamins*. Temple chariot ('*Ther*') is the living testimony for the history of the temple.

Virupakshipalayam has carved out as an important place in the social and political history of Dindigul region. A sect of Naicker community had migrated from Andhra due to the aggression of Muslim rule. They belonged to the *Kambalathar* sect and they were also called as *Thottia nayak* and *Rajakambalathar*. Once Chinnappa nayak helped Thirumalai nayak in an expedition against the Muslim region and brought laurels to the Nayak's kingdom. So King Thirumalai nayak ordained Chinnappanayakar as Thirumalai Chinnappanayakar. He formed settlements at Rengamalai, Edayakottai, Kothapulli and built a fort for his brother and named it Edayakottai. He constructed a big fort and a temple in this region and named it Periyakottai.

Thirumalai Chinnappa Naicker

Thirumalai Chinnappa Naicker was interested in Temple building. He has built many temples including *Kulanthai Velappar* Temple at *Varahagiri* (near oddanchathram), *Virupakshi Eswaran* Temple, *NeelimalaiAlagarkoil* and *VenugopalsamyKoil*. He has erected a big temple for *Kathirinathaperumal*, *Easwaran* and one for his family deity *Leguwammal* and made endowments for its festivals near Periyakottai. Now these three temples and the fort has perished.⁴

There were 20 rulers listed in a letter written by Zamindar Thirumalai Ponnappanayak to the Madurai Collector Cornal Colon Mehenz dated 1816, June 16. Thirumalai Errathimma Chinnappanayak, the fourth ruler and his son Thirumalai Varahagiri Chinnappa Nayak had nominated, Puthukudinayakan, Devanayakan, Vellapanayakan, Pottikamannayakan, Lakkamanayakan, Alagappanayakan, Kollamanayakan, ChinnaVelappanayakan, Annamanayakan, Kappilia Nayakan, Appalanayakan and Veerappanayakan to form new settlements and named them after them. They are Puthukkottai, Devathur, Pottikaman Patti, LakkamaKottai, Athikottai, Kollapatty, Ambigai, and Varalapatty.⁵

Nilakkottai Palayam

Nilakkottai *palayam* was under 17 rulers in succession from the founder *Makkala nayak* to the last ruler *Kuloppa nayak* ruling for years. But in this list submitted to the Madurai collector there are seven *Nayakars* with the same *Koolappan nayak*. The eight ruler *Nagama nayak* constructed a temple for *Gopala Narasinga Perumal*. The Ninth ruler *Periamathalu nayak* constructed a temple for *Thimmaraya Perumal* and dug a big tank near the temple. The tenth ruler *Koolappan nayak* constructed *Alagarkoil* with a tank. The 12th ruler constructed a temple for *Narasimha Perumal* at *Sivelacharugu* temple with a tank. The 14th ruler *Kulappanayak* has constructed a temple with tank at *Kariampatty* and dedicated it to Lord Siva.

Manparaipalayam was founded by *Kesavappanayak* and Ellaipatty, Paraipatty, Kathiriapalayam, Ayyampalayam, Vadugapatty and Kanavaipatty are developed with water sources.

Aarani Ramana nayak founded Dindigul *palayam* and constructed a temple for Gopalakrishna Swami in Mullipadi on the banks of SanthanaVarthini River. During the rule of Rani Meenakshi two regents called Akkareddy and Rengareddy had considerable political influence in this region.

Rettaipadi palayam was allotted to these brothers by the Viswanath of Madurai Nayak. This rule started from Potithoppanayakan. The last ruler was Ramaswami Thopaiyanayaka. Aivarmalai attained a high status by their patronage.

Sukkampatty palayam was allotted to *Bala mullondumuthiya nayak*. He constructed a temple at Thamaraiapady and found a new settlement at Kovilur, Chithuvarpatty, Thenampatty and Kolathur. There were 20 rulers in all who ruled this palayam.

Decline and fall of *palayams* ignited by two 'Palayakar wars'. The first poligar war started in March 1799 and ended in May 1802. The second was in 1805. The first war was the culmination of Veerapandya Katta Pomman of Panjalagurichi. In this battle they were pitted against the mighty English Company.

In 1736, the region of the Madurai Nayaks came to an end. After the death of Chanda Shahib in 1752, Mohammed Ali became the ruler of the Carnatic Region. A period of confusion prevailed as the European powers entered into frequent wars. Mohammed Ali assigned the districts to the British Company for a short period by a Treaty in 1785. But in 1787, the British took full control after a Treaty. By a Treaty in 1792 between Lord Cornwallis and Mohammed Ali the English were conferred the right to collect the tribute from the poligars. Though the Treaty was not fully acceptable to the English, they did not change it till the death of Mohammed Ali. His son *Umdat-ul-Umra* succeeded but fell in the hands of the English. When *Umdat-ul-Umra* died on 15th June 1805, The English Company got an opportunity to grip their control over the region. When the eldest son of *Umdat-ul-Umra*, Ali Hussain resisted a treaty with the English. The English turned this chance to establish their sovereignty over the region. In a diplomatic move, Governor Edward Clive of Madras made a Treaty with *Arim - ul - Doula* a branch of *Muhammed Ali*'s family. The Governor General of India, Lord Wellesley approved the Treaty. This Treaty had a historical impact upon the socio-economic history of Dindigul. The Collector of Dindigul was appointed as Collector of Madurai and Dindigul region.

When Alexander Macleod was appointed as Collector of Dindigul on September 1, 1790, he forwarded the account of the poligars to the board of revenue. He has pointed that most of the poligars were dethroned by Tippu Sultan. This endeavor gave an opportunity to the *poligars* to regain their *palayams*. The recalcitrant *poligars* had frequent encounter with the English over levy fixation or territory boundary fixation. They had possessed huge armed servants. The District Collector frequently requested for more enforcement to quell the poligars unrest. With the powerful troops the collector had complete control over the poligars.

Alexander MacLeod had divided the territory into six taluks for administrative purpose. They were Thandikudi, Periyakulam, Batalagundu, Andipatty, Uthamapalayam and Kamabam.

The recalcitrant poligars of several *palayams* were forced to pay the annual tribute to the company. The collector had to use force to collect the revenue. With the help of company's sepoys the revenue was collected. From these areas a turbulent atmosphere with the grip of fear prevailed turning this period. When the collector approached the Bodinayakanur fort, the poligar with his armed men, resisted in defense. But the company's sepoys acted swiftly and opened fire.

With the help of 400 armed men from Vengadagiri, and Bodinayakanur, Poligar repulsed the British forces. The Board authorized the collector to use military force if necessary.

The Ayakudi and Virupakchipalayars had a boundry dispute and other poligars had the same problem. So, the political unrest prevailed in these areas, a futile situation turned uncontrollable, the Dindigul collector published a notification in 1795 directing the poligars of Dindigul to disband all their armed forces with an assurance. A severe warning was issued to the disobedient poligars.

In 1796, the government appointed a commission consisting of William Harrington and William MacLeod to investigate the causes of the disorder. The commission handed over the report to the new collector Thomas Bowyer Hurdis. After the fall of *Srirangapattnam* and the death of *Tipu Sultan*, the poligars gave up their resistance.

Meanwhile the court of Directors issued an order for the abolition of the military power of the poligars. The disgruntled poligars engaged in wars with the company forces. It started with the heroic struggle by Veerapandyakattapomman of Panchalankurichi and Pulidevan of Sankarankoil. But they had to face the mighty gun power of the British and were defeated.⁶

The raise of *palayams* witnesses the consecration of new temples. Virupakshi palayakarar had constructed and consecrated Lakshmi Narasimha Perumal temple (Gurunathanayakanoor) temple in Koviloor. Kannivadi Palayam had constructed Kathir Narasima perumal temple (Kottha puli) and a temple in the same name at Kannivadi. Ammainayakanoor Palayam had constructed Kathali Narasima Perumal temple (Ammainayanoor), and Vijayanagar Empire regent Achutharayar had titled the construction and structure of many temples with Vaishnava flavour. Kathirinatha Perumal temple is the testimony for the patronage of Virupakshi Palayam. This temple flourshied in Poligar's rule and was renovated three times by the heirs of Virupakshi Palayam. Now it is in a completely ruined state.

After the elimination of the *Palayams*, the *Zamin, Rayatvari* system was promulgated in December 1 - 1801. The Valla kondama Nayak became the *Zamin* of this region. He has made eight days 'Adi Bramorchavam (Adi - festival) and the Car festival (*Ratha Urchavam*) on the Ninth day. He has stayed here for all the days with his royalentourage and the same was announced with magnificent Drum beatings ("peria murasu"). This custom was in vogue

for many years. Once, some landlords of Vadamadurai had conducted the chariot festival without giving proper respect to the *Zamindar*. Valla kondama Nayak returned with utter humiliation. The *Zamin*, had to retreat to his palace with his paraphernalia. The *Zamin* people infuriated by the events, had torched the chariot. With great despise Valla Kondama Nayaka passed away without an heir. Due to the negligence of the local people at that time, the chariot met the natural calamities. Since then the *Zamin* lineage had patronaged this temple. Even now the authority had remembered the "*Valla Kondama Vagaiyara*" for three times during the Bramorchavam.⁷ The decline and fall of poligars had many political and social twists. The dissatisfied poligars in the Southern districts were influenced by Marudu Pandian of Sivaganga and Gopalanayak poligars of Virupakshi in 1801, a major insurrection took place in Tirunelveli, Dindigul and Sivaganga. The British took strong measures by mobilising a powerful army to suppress them, consequently they defeated the religious poligars and strengthened their authority.⁸

The turbulent poligars were made subservient to the authority of the government. Twenty-six *palayams* in Dindigul and Palani. Eriyodu and Virupakshi were forfeited for the rebellion and the poligars were punished.⁹

After the suppression of the *Poligari* system, a peaceful and beneficial condition of the *Zamindari* under the new revenue settlement on the basis of *Zamindari* system came into being. The era of war between the Poligars and the ruling powers came to an end.¹⁰

The *Zamindari* system created a group of smaller and bigger landlords with their particular territorial jurisdiction. Ammayanayanur *Zamin*, Ayakudi *Zamin*, Kannivadi *Zamin*, Manaparai *Zamin* are some of the *Zamin* with large revenue areas. Ammayanayakanur was an extensive *Palayam* of about 235 square kilometers in which Sirumalai hills form a greater portion with the area of seventy kilometers. Ayakudi *Zamin* extends in length from north to south covering an area of twenty seven kilometers and east to west, eight kilometers containing a surface area of 126 square kilometers.¹¹

The *Zamindars* of Madurai District mostly belonged to the Kambalaythar *Tottiya Nayakkar* community. They migrated from North India to Anandapur District in Andrapradesh. When Muslims invaded their country in the Vijayanagar Kingdom they were employed as military peons. When the Vijayanagar Empire invaded Madurai, they came to the South and settled in Madurai, Dindigul, Tirunelvelli and Manapparai.¹²

The Kambalathar bear the 'Gento' appellation of *Nayak* as Ammanayak, Bodinayak etc.,¹³ the care of religious matter was entrusted to them. Their caste prohiths or gurus were called the Kambilinayak and the Codangi Nayak. Even as this system continued in the *Zamindari* circles, *Brahminical* influence gradually penetrated in their social customs. Consequently, the *Brahmins* were invited to recite religious hymns and conduct religious sacrifices. They were also granted *Inam* lands for rendering religious duties to the *Zamindars*.¹⁴

Religion played an important part in the culture of the individuals and society. Religion exercised an abiding influence on the people and moulded their culture. They were steeped in multitude of religious rites and superstitious beliefs which indirectly created

social and religious evils. The *Zamindars* of Madurai were mostly *vaishnavites*. They usually belonged to the Thottiya Nayak caste. They brought the Vaishnava deities, such as the God of *Ahobilam* while migrating to the South and consecrated them in many shrines. Among the deity *Perumal* (*Vishnu*) was commonly worshiped.¹⁵

The *Zamindars* created big endowments for the conduct of religious rites in the temples. Temples occupied a highly conspicuous place in the society. (Endowments were created for this purpose) The company's administration passed Regulation to see that the income from the endowment was used for both religious and charitable purposes. It compelled the revenue servants to render the necessary service to the religious institutions as such endowments were created for the convenience of the public.¹⁶ Kathirinatha Perumal temple is the testimony for the patronage of Virupakshi Palayam. This temple flourished in Poligar's rule and was renovated three times by the heirs of Virupakshi Palayam. Now it is in a completely ruined state.

After the Independence many new temples were reconstructed. The study of Vaishnavam revealed such hitherto unknown factors for the perusal of the scholars. Gurunatha Naickanur (G.Kovilpatty) Lakshmi Narasimha Perumal temple is being modernised and reconstructed in two acres.

Besides creating endowments, the *Zamindars* constructed temples in their respective *Zamins*. The innumerable temple festivals and ceremonies that the *Zamindars* had organized made them a powerful force to be reckoned with. Their influence reached a zenith in the social life and the people began to cherish their memory. The system thus became the nucleus of the people and the agrarian life.¹⁷

Conclusion

Religious and cultural patronage commanded respect of the men around them. The active participation of the *Zamindars* in the religious affairs coincided with public activities in favour of the people. Philanthropy brought name and fame and raised the social status of the *Zamindars*. Private charity was made for the general benefits of the community and as such it received suitable public recognition.

In this culture analysis various authors have approached the impact of religion on Tamil society from time immemorial to this day progressively in an intellectual way. Chronological religious experiences of Tamils based on the progressive thoughts had been assessed and documented. If Dindigul administration and the department of Archeology take necessary steps to reconstruct and restore this site, the dynamic past glory can be brought back. It is high time that the authorities should take steps. Otherwise this site would become plots for sale.

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