

## ROYAL WOMEN AND TEMPLE ENDOWMENTS IN MEDIEVAL TAMIL NADU

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### **Introduction**

Religion has the potential to play a significant role in society. Religion can promote divisions, hatred, divisiveness, exploitation, dominance, retribution, and violence in addition to ethics, creativity, holistic growth, partnership, accountability, devotion and faith, hope and inspiration, inner experience and mystical vision, and so on. In Tamil society, religion is a very powerful and purposeful element. In all civilised cultures, it is an institution that has control over the people. As a result, religions are a reflection of both god and man. Because it is life to be lived, not a theory to be accepted or a belief to be held, various approaches to the divine have scope and validity. Religion is the mental faculty that allows a person to apprehend the infinite without the aid of reason or sensation. The Hindu religion's mainstay and backbone are temples. Worshiping Gods at temples instills divinity and purity in the devotees' minds and hearts. The Hindus place a higher value on *danam* or *gifts*. According to Hindu dharmashastra, a portion of every human being's earnings should be set aside and dedicated to charity. The royal women's offering, as well as other common women's donations of land, sheep or goats, utensils, gold, *kasus* (coins), eternal lamp (Nanda Vilakku), Ghee, temple repair, and food supply for festival day are all discussed in this paper.

### **Temples**

The Tamils' ancient temple was mentioned in Sangam literature. The prehistoric dolmens may have been the source of temples. In Sangam literature, the house of God is referred to as *koil* and *kottam*, while the God in the *koil* is referred to as *kon*, *iraivan*, and *kadavul*.<sup>1</sup> The temples should be distinct from primitive dolmens and cottages, as well as Buddhist stupas. The hut's shape is similar to that of a stupa and the top of the central shrine, known as the *vimana*. The main object of worship was *Kanthu*, a wooden plank, which was once the trunk of a tree (*Kandu* in ancient Tamil). It was thought that when the temple deteriorated, the god would leave. Various deities' figures were painted on the wall or on a screen that hung in the sanctum. According to literary sources, there were also dwellings on the temple grounds, and the temple had a fence, indicating the presence of a *prakara* around the temple.<sup>2</sup> According to K.A.Nilakanta Sastri, "the silver period of South Indian Saivism and Vaisnavism may be stated to begin under the Cholas line of Vijayalaya". Religion had a profound influence on social systems. The Cholas established Hinduism as

the supreme religion.<sup>3</sup> Over time, the monarch wished to instill this idea in the people through the institution of religion, so he built temples and funded their upkeep with grants. With donations from the monarchs' royal family, chieftains, officials, and common people, the Temple grew into a strong socio-religious institution<sup>3</sup>. People have purchased lands from individuals or village assemblies in the past, and some of the lands have been granted to temples.<sup>4</sup>

The temples received a variety of land gifts. By making these contributions, the contributors hoped to gain merit for themselves, their dead relatives, or their lords. Five grants were given for the upkeep of the flower garden and employees. They were also used to make daily food offerings to the gods. The temples were given grants for the upkeep of everlasting lighting. For example, the provision of religious articles, the celebration of festivals, the recital of Holy Scriptures before God, the feeding of Brahmins, and the maintenance and repair of temples.<sup>5</sup> The grants enabled the temples to operate on a stable and self-sufficient financial basis, allowing them to engage in a wide range of activities. The temple became the most prominent institution of the Tamil country during the mediaeval period, both sculpturally and architecturally. It was extremely important in mediaeval Tamil society.<sup>6</sup>

### **Women Endowments in Sangam Age**

While it is preferable in an ideal marriage for man and woman to be equal in beauty, attainments, riches, manners, and so on, the *Tolkappiyam* states that if a difference between the two is unavoidable, it is preferable for the male to be superior to the woman. There was no mention of women rulers or women who were noted for making endowments as there was in later ages, and the chief queen of the king was known as Ko-illal (Ko-illal meaning the king's primary wife), and there was no mention of women rulers or women who were noted for making endowments as there was in later ages. Women of Sangam age had no right to inherit, own, or dispose of property.<sup>7</sup> Property ownership and alienation. Two inscriptions in Tamil language in Tamil Brahmi characters from Aranattarmalai near Pukalur, dating from the first century C.E., recount donations from two sisters to the Jain dwelling atop the hill. The gifts were prepared by Pittan of Nalliyur's daughters Korri and Nori. The two records are among a slew of other donations, including those from a Chera ruler, a gold merchant, and others. It shows that women had equal rights to own wealth and make contributions from the beginning of the Common Era, as evidenced by public documents.<sup>8</sup>

### **Women Endowments in Pallava Age**

The royal princesses had a good education and were well-versed in the various arts. The royal women relished the opportunity to own land and bestow precious gifts on temples. The Pallava queens were highly interested in endowing temple worship with gifts and creating monuments to their favourite gods. The Pallava kings not only built temples, but also endowed them with the ability to perform rites and festivals. For the upkeep of temple activities, people in the higher social level provided both monetary and king donations. Chadurvedi, the queen of heir presumptive Yavamaharaja Vijaybhudhavarman,

is remembered for her copper plate gift of four nivartanas (land extensions) to a Vishnu temple at Dalura.<sup>9</sup>

For her prosperity, long life, and health, a Pallava queen, Carudevi, gave land to the temple of Pakavan Narayana of Kuli Maktarakadevakulam, "ammakeayurpalavattaniyam". The queen was Yuvamharaja Buddhavarman's consort and mother of Buddhiyankura. "Yuvamaharajassa Bharadvayassa Pallavanam Sri Vijaya Buddhavammassa devi, Buddhankura Janani Carudevi, Ammahe Sampadatta", says Yuvamaharajassa Bharadvayassa Pallavanam Sri Vijaya Buddhavammassa devi, Buddhankura Janani Carudevi, Ammahe Sampadatta. Pallava Yuvamaharaja was alive when the queen made this gift, according to the archives.<sup>10</sup> Rangapataka, a great queen of the Pallava ruler, Rajasimha's, erected a temple of Siva in front of Rajasimhesvara temple (Kailasanatha temple) Kanchi, where her gift is recorded in a copper plate inscription, in the early 4<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E. In the gift, the husband and wife were given equal weight (dharma). Similar gifts made directly to religious organisations by women can be discovered in large numbers. Viramahadevi, a queen of Pallava ruler Nirpatungavarman, gifted 50 Kalanjupon gold to the temple of Tirukkodikkaval in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, using gold obtained from Hiranya-garbha (donor must pass through lotus-like pot made of gold while performing yaga (sacrifice) and Tula-bhara (king or other exalted against gold and distributing the same temple) ceremonies performed by queen.<sup>11</sup>

"Nirubatungamaharayardeviyar Viramahadeviyar, Hiraniyagarbhamum Tulabharamum Pukka Ponnill", the inscriptions read. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century C.E., Madevatika, a Pallava queen, gave gold to the Siva temple in Tiruvorriyur. KilvanTecappukai, a queen of the Pandiya ruler Manaparan in the 10<sup>th</sup> century C.E., gave gold to the Tillaittanam temple to burn an everlasting candle. Reva was the name of NandivarmanPallavamalla's queen, who was from the Rashtrakuta line. Muthesvara's shrine, known as Dharma Madavis Varagraham, was built by this queen. Viramadeviryar was the queen of Nripathunga. She is said to have performed the hiranyagrabha and tulabhara ceremonies at Tirukkodikkaval and given the local temple 50 kalanjus of gold earned during these festivities. Appinagai, the wife of Satrubavankara Muttaraiyan of Alangudi, gave a gift of 25 sheep in exchange for a lamb to be sacrificed in the Tentirumalirunjolai temple of Karumanikkadeva in Kilkakkurram. Kannikudi's AnukkiSundaravalli is from Kil-Iran. Yamuttam offered a perennial lamb, which could be used to hang before the temple's main idol in Tirukostiyur.<sup>12</sup>

### Women Endowments in Pandya Age

The Pandya queens were also religious patrons who encouraged temple construction. They also gave lands and money to conduct daily poojas and festivals, as well as mandapas, shrines, and kitchens in the existing temple. There was no one among the Pandya queens who could match Sembian Mahadevi, the Chola queen. Who gave her entire life and boundless energy to religion and the construction of a beautiful temple? Even as temple patrons, women were undervalued during the Imperial Pandya period. Only Devaradiyars are prominent as female donors, and not even queens play a significant part in this. The Tiruvisalur temple was endowed by Srivalluvar, the wife of the Pandya king

Srivallabhs. Chokkataandal, Jatavarman Virapandya's queen, gave her donation money to two temple Devaradiyars to feed the Brahmins. The same queen gave the Sucihindram Temple two hundred pon as an offering to the deity and to feed three Brahmins.<sup>13</sup>

Sattan Ganapati, a commander, Mahasamanta, of the Pandya ruler, Maran Cadayan Varaguna I, renovated the cave temple at Tirupparankunram, near Madurai, now famous for its Subrahmanya shrine, but originally dedicated to Siva, Vishnu, and other deities (770 C.E.) Nakkan Korri, Samanta Ganapati's wife (referred to as "dharma pattini"), erected two new shrines, one to Jyestha and the other to Durga. The temples were affiliated with Devaradiyars, who were specialists in dance and music. Despite the fact that Sati and Devaradiyar were mentioned by Marco Polo, Barbosa, Caesar Frederic, and others, temple authorities granted them land grants for their committed service to the temples.<sup>14</sup> They were also given special treatment when it came to temple worship.

Santhan Deyam, a Devaradiyar of Brahmapuri temple, presented an everlasting lamp during the second regional year of Varaguna II (C.E. 864). Similarly, the Devaradiyars of Mannarkovil Gopalaswamy temple donated lands and dwellings on behalf of the Ur, Sabah of that location. During the Pandya dynasty, the Devaradiyars' status was thus far from despicable. It will help one to assess the overall state of ladies. Because the Devadasis were affiliated with temples, they held a prestigious standing in society. Ulagamulududaiyal, the queen of Vikrama Pandya Deva, is said to have built a Mandapa, according to an inscription. She also made arrangements for the recitation of Vedas in the temple in Tirunamanallur in the South Arcot District early in the morning. The kitchen was established by the queen Ulagamulududaiyal in the same temple, according to an inscription on the Tirutalisvara temple at Tiruppattur in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Tribhuvana Chakravarthin Srivallabha deva.<sup>15</sup>

Another inscription in Madurai's Madanagopalaswami temple recounts queen Ulagamulududaiyal's donation of land (after purchase) as Madapuram in the third regnal year of Tribhuvana Chakravarthi Srivallabha. The queen of Virapandya is said to have given great presents and exquisite gems to the Siva temple in Tiruvorriyur, according to an inscription.<sup>16</sup> The Brahmins were also given Chaturvedimangalams by the queen of Pandya rulers. Avanimuludaiyal Chaturvedi mangalam and Bhuvanamuludaiyal were two among them. As part of their religious obligations, kings and queens made such endowments. In 1283 C.E., the queen Ulagamulududaiyal established a sandhi in her and her husband Vikramapandya's names. Apart from that, public charities were established in the name of queens. According to an inscription, the villagers of Perumballur donated land in order to hold a special Akkantirunal festival in the temple on the birthday of Barani in honour of the queen Tennavanaimuludum udaiyal.<sup>17</sup>

### Endowments and the Chola Temple

The temple's evolution is influenced by a variety of aspects, including architectural, sculptural, iconographic, ceremonial, and social organisation, to name a few. In the Pallava and Pandya kingdoms, a number of rock temples arose, and cave temples grew into structure temples. The seaside temple in Mahabalipuram and the Kailasanatha temple in

Kanchi were the most famous and beautiful of these beginnings. The Cholas and Pandyas, for example, focused their efforts on temple construction. In Tanjore and Gangaikondacholapuram, Rajaraja I and Rajendra I built large structural temples. The Chola rulers demonstrated their artistic and architectural abilities by building temples in a variety of styles. Aditya-I is praised for his stone temple construction. Kandanmaravan erected Tiruttoram's Udhaya Mahadeva temple out of bricks. The smaller early Chola temples resembled those of Muktesvara and Matangesvara in Kanchi in appearance.<sup>18</sup> The temple construction cost the Tamil rulers a lot of money. The Kanakasabha or Golden Hall of the Chidambaram temple, for example, was built by Parantaka Chola.<sup>19</sup>

The temple was the centre of the community's social and economic life, receiving substantial patronage and donations from the royal houses and the state, as well as a variety of smaller offerings, usually for the donor's 'merit' or that of a specific beneficiary (such as husband, son, brother, king, etc). The latter were required to fund a range of everyday temple duties, such as food offerings to the various 'murtis' in the temple ('nonda vilakku') or dawn or dusk ('sandhyadipam'), or flowers, etc., to devotees and Brahmins. Eight gifts were made directly in kind – gold and silver jewellery or vessels, lamps, etc., but they were more frequently given indirectly in a two-stage process, in which the temple's service was maintained through the income earned or interest on an asset assigned to the temple, or farmed out to specific individuals and groups or local assemblies.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

The Sangam Cholas awoke from a long sleep in the 9<sup>th</sup> century C.E., following the collapse of the Pallava and Pandya empires. Between the beginnings of the 9<sup>th</sup> century C.E. until the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century C.E., the Chola dominated the Tamil kingdom. The Chola dynasty was one of the most powerful dynasties in southern India's history. The Cholas were feudatories in Uraiur when the Sangam period ended. Tanjore was their capital. They expanded their influence in Sri Lanka and the Malay Peninsula as well. As a result, they are referred to as the Imperial Cholas. Thousands of inscription queens were enthusiastic participants in the society's events. Despite being fervent Saivism adherents, they were tolerant enough to build temples for other religious faiths. Several Chola queens paid personal visits to temples and bestowed endowments. Women with the freedom and property to establish temples and make endowments for offerings and temple maintenance were Queen Sembiyam Mdvi, Queen Vimai Kuntavai, Kundavai (Daughter of Sundarachola), Queen Pancavan Mdvi, and Queen Vanavan Mdvi. Religion was an integral aspect of the Chola royal women's lives. In fact, they bolstered the hands of their male rulers, who used religious polity as one of their tools of maintaining control. The feudal qualities and imperialistic motives of the kings of the ancient time, the influence of alien culture, and the formation of composite culture all had an impact on the role, contribution, and changing attitudes of women in Medieval South India from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Many different types of people contributed endowments to help with temple renovations. Despite the religious ideals that permeated the period, we find evidence of temple desperation, particularly during turbulent times. These, on the other hand, were unusual

occurrences. Normally the temple was the recipient of considerable endowments from various quarters and for various purposes.

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