

TIRUVIDAVAYAL AS AN URBAN CENTRE TRACED THROUGH PUNYANATHA SWAMY TEMPLE INSCRIPTIONS

Dr. R. Brinda Kumari

Assistant Professor

Meenakshi College for Women (A), Kodambakkam, Chennai

Abstract

The Temples served as repositories of wealth and social convergence in ancient India and also acted as an archive of the socio, economic, cultural and political aspects of a place and as such the Tiruvidavayal temple which is situated in Tiruvarur, Old Tanjore district in Nannilam Taluk consists of 25 inscriptions, which reflects the socio, cultural and political significance of the place especially during the Chola regime. Tiruvarur has been known for its historical background and cultural past. It has several legends to its credit; Tiruvarur was ruled by the kings of Sangam Period, the Kalabhras, the Pallavas, the Cholas, the Later Pandyas, the Vijayanagara kings, the Tanjore Nayaks and the Marathas. During the age, Tiruvarur came to witness development in different fields like politics, society, art and socio economy so is the temple.

Keywords: *Mangalanadu, Pana, Arulmozhideva valanadu, Rishabhadeva, Kasu.*

Introduction

The development and mingling of the different aspects of the social life resulted in the new course of life in the society. The new course of life ushered into by the cultural development in Tiruvidavayal that have been attested by the references and findings in the Tamil literary sources, inscriptions, architecture, sculptures, antiquities, and the accounts left by foreign travellers who visited Tamil Nadu. During the third century B.C., people in Tiruvarur district were known for their civilization and culture. During the Sangam period, the Chola ruled their region with Uraiyur and Kaveripumpattinam as their capitals. The literatures also give references about the existence of some Chieftains who also ruled the region agreeing to remit tributes to the Cholas. During the Sangam Age, the kings like Perunarkilli, Kopperumcholan, Elanchetchenni, Karikalperuvalatan, Nalankilli, Nedunkilli, Killivalavan ruled over the region. Nannilam came into prominence during the suzerainty of the Imperial Cholas. Nannilam despite being an historically important place also played a dominant role in the cultural, social, and economic life of the people during that period. The Tiruvidavayal concurrently played an equal role as that of Tiruvarur and Nannilam.

Significance

Tiruvidavayal village stand as a sign of the cultural past, it deserves its historical significance with the aspect of society, culture, architecture, and administration. Tiruvidavayal came to be divided into regions under the administration of the Cholas. The remote village in the Nannilam taluk, Tiruvidavayal came under *Mangalanadu a subdivision of Arulmolideva Valanadu* division of the Cholas. Thus, Tiruvidavayal formed a prominent part in the Cholas administration.

Contribution of Nambi Andar in Thiruvudavayal

The Punyanatha swamy temple in Tiruvudavayal owes its significance through many Saiva saints who sang about the praise of the Punyanatha swamy. Nambi Andar Nambi, the author who arranged the Saiva Canon substantially in the form in which we now find it, was most probably a contemporary of Rajaraja I and Rajendra I. The account of his life and work given in a short Purana attributed to Umapati Siva Acara of the early fourteenth century seems to conserve during much legendary matter, a correct account of this and the growth of the canon was vested in the hands of Nambi himself and his successors. It has been said that the inclusion, in the canon, of Nambi's own poems and those of other writers like Karuvur Devar, manifestly later than Rajaraja's reign and the title Abhaya and Kulasekhara given by Umapati to the Chola king who was Nambi's contemporary, imply a later date for the redaction of the canon.¹ Even in Nambi's time, difficulty was experienced in making the collection of hymns complete-as may be seen from the hymn in Thiruvudavayal by Gnanasambandar, unknown to the canon, and preserved as an inscription and in the form of a legend and preserved from the destruction by the white ants found in the bulk of the palm leaves containing the hymns.²

Early Rajaraja Chola I Inscriptions (990 A.D.)

Fragmentary Inscription

A lithic record from the 5th regnal year of Rajaraja I, engraved on the south wall of the mandapa, is incomplete. However, it is historically valuable because it mentions Pudarkudi, a hamlet situated in Ayanthunga Chaturvedimangalam under Arumolideva Valanadu of *Mangalanadu*.³ This helps us to study the new settlements established by the Cholas and thus the Shrub lands were reclaimed as new settlement areas.

Medieval Chola Inscriptions (1021-1023 A.D.)

The Inscription of Rajendra Chola I

The earliest inscription from Tiruvudavayal dates to 1021 A.D., during the 9th regnal year of Rajendra I. Engraved on the north wall of the Puniyanatha Swamy Temple, the inscription records a significant endowment by a lady donor, who gifted twenty-eight *kalams* of paddy. This donation was intended to feed the Devaradiyars on festival days.⁴ What makes this inscription economically important is the mention of an interest rate of three *kuruni* per *kalam* per year, which generated seven *kalams* of paddy as annual interest. Such precise financial recording reveals that a formalised agrarian-credit system operated within the temple economy.

The Inscription of Rajendra I

In 1022 A.D., an inscription engraved on the north wall of the Mahamandapa documents a ritual endowment offered to the Siva Brahmanas of the temple. After receiving sixteen *kasus*, these Brahmanas agreed to light eight *sandhi* lamps every day.⁵ This inscription is crucial for understanding early Chola ritual administration, particularly the structured nature of daily worship and the responsibilities undertaken by temple priests.

Donation of Paddy

Another inscription belonging to 1023 A.D. is carved on the north wall of the mandapa. Written in Tamil, it again records a paddy donation by a woman, which was received by the temple treasurers. This reinforces the continuing role of women as active and regular contributors to the economic and ritual life of the temple.

Land Endowment

A more elaborate inscription from the 4th regnal year of Rajendra I is engraved on the south wall of the central shrine. It registers a land gift meant for maintaining the *Thiruppalli-arai* (resting shrine) and supporting the recitation of *Thiruppattu* hymns. The donor belonged to the Mudaliyar Thiruvaiyurudayan lineage, indicating elite involvement in ritual preservation. The inscription also describes about the endowment given to the Thiruttondattogaiyan Guhai (cave), where the Devaram was consecrated, founded by Anaimangalamudaiyan Ariyan Vaduganathan alias Sennavaraiyar for the merit of Vanadarayar.⁷ It further refers to Udaiya Nayanar of Thirukkalamalam in Kaluma Nadu, this particular inscription is of prime importance since it speaks about many monastic orders that existed in the Saiva pantheon and the nurturing of the same through many endowments, as well shows the crucial role played by various Saiva monastic orders and moreover these monastic orders resided in caves constructed for the purpose of monastery that laid in the vicinity of the temple.

Rajadhiraja Chola I's Contribution (1032 A.D.)

Lamp Endowment

An inscription set up in 1032 A.D., during the 14th regnal year of Rajadhiraja Chola I, appears on the south wall of the mandapa. It begins with the king's meykeerthi, "*Maduraiyum Ezhamum Kondar*", celebrating his victories. The record itself documents a gift of *kasus* for the purpose of lamp lighting in the temple. This inscription underscores that royal-period donations were closely linked to ritual illumination and temple upkeep.⁸

Monetary Donation

Another inscription from the 9th regnal year of Rajaraja I records a gift of money by Kottur Ambalathadi Ponnambala Kuttan. His donation was intended specifically for burning lamps in the temple⁹. This demonstrates that local elite patrons contributed actively to temple illumination and ritual continuity.

Dancing girl Donation

During the 19th regnal year, a gift of money for a lamp was made by a dancing girl residing in one of the hamlets of Virudarayabhayan karapuram in Tiruchola-nadu a subdivision of Arumolideva-valanadu.¹⁰ This shows that the temple acted as an egalitarian sector during these periods, hence the people belonging to any domain despite their communal barriers donated for the temple and the temple accepted the same.

The Kulottunga I Phase (Late 11th to Early 12th Century)

Lamp Endowment

An inscription on the north wall of the mandapa from the 4th regnal year of Kulottunga I records a donation of 18 *kasus* intended for lamp burning. This demonstrates the continuation of lamp-related offerings under the later Cholas.¹¹

Ritual Offering

During the 5th regnal year, a donation was made by a native of Inganadu for oil bath, offerings, and Rishabadeva Procession.¹²

A second inscription from the 5th regnal year records a gift of money for a lamp by a native of Vidaiyapuram *alias* Virudarajabhayankarapuram in Takkalar-nadu, a sub-division of Arumolideva-valanadu. The money was received by the Sivabrahmana and the Mahesvara-Aryas.¹³

Ritual Donations

An inscription of the 9th regnal year of Kulottunga I shows the social unity that prevailed as far as the temple is considered. It records a monetary gift by a washer man from Nenmalinattu Brahmadeyan *alias* Mathana Manjari Chaturvedi Mangalam. Despite his occupational status, he was permitted to make ritual donations, demonstrating the non-discriminatory character of Chola temple patronage.¹⁴

At the same year a donation of 40 *kasu* was made by a lady of komapuram to the temple of Tiruvidavayil-Udaiyar and it was received by the temple treasures.¹⁵

Elite Donation

A particularly important inscription from the 10th regnal year of Kulottunga I, engraved on the north wall, records a donation of *pana* by Thanjavur chief Sivalogamudaiyan Thiru Vekambamudaiyan.¹⁶ His title suggests elite status, and his donation highlights inter-regional ritual patronage and the importance of the temple and hence endowments were received from various places away from its vicinity.

Fragmentary Record

An inscription from 1101 A.D., the 39th regnal year of Kulottunga I, is found on the south wall of the Mandapa. Though fragmented, it registers a sale of land to the temple.¹⁷

Vikrama Chola's Inscription (1126 A.D.)

Oil Endowment

An inscription from 1126 A.D., the 8th regnal year of Vikrama Chola, is engraved on the south wall of the mandapa. Beginning with the king's meyerthe, it records a gift of *kasus* intended for the regular supply of oil for daily temple services and offerings.¹⁸ The donation was received by the temple treasurers, indicating a structured administrative arrangement.

Gift of Twilight lamp

During the 9th regnal year, a donation of lamp was made by Dukkaiyalvar to the temple of Tiruvidavayil-Udaiyar also mentions Tiruchoharai in Serrur-kurram a subdivision of Tirunaraipur-nadu.¹⁹ A donation at the same regnal year a gift of 4 *kasu* for a lamp was donated by Narayanan Arürpidaran, a native of Tiruchcharai in Tirunaraivar-nadu.²⁰

Interpretation and Findings

The chronological inscriptions of Tiruvidavayal demonstrate a remarkable continuity in the temple's economic life across more than two centuries. From the earliest record in 1021 A.D. to the later Chola period in the thirteenth century, the temple consistently received donations in the form of paddy, *kasus*, *pana* and land. These offerings were not occasional; rather, they formed part of a sustained system of ritual financing. Donations of paddy supported the feeding of Devaradiyars,²¹ while monetary endowments ensured the daily lighting of sandhi lamps, oil supply and *abhishekam* rituals. The recording of interest rates such as three *kuruni* per *kalam* of paddy²² highlights the presence of a structured agrarian credit system. This long-term continuity indicates that the temple functioned as a stabilizing economic institution, regulating ritual expenses and managing community wealth. Though many temples showcase the women donors, this temple particularly brings forth the active social participation of lay women in more number compared to the other temples.

Evolving Donor Patterns

A significant evolution in donor demographics over time in the inscriptions, especially the early inscriptions of Rajendra I, exhibits the women donors appearing prominently, offering paddy for ritual feeding. Their contributions signify financial agency and their central role in sustaining temple activities. As the centuries progress, the donor base widens to include elite patrons, such as Kottur Kilavan Ambalathadi Ponnambala Kuttan²³ and Thanjavur chief Sivalogamudaiyan,²⁴ whose monetary gifts supported lamp lighting and temple services. Notably, the inscriptions from Kulottunga I's reign mark a socially inclusive phase, with contributions from a washerman and villagers from regions such as Inganadu²⁵ and Vidayapuram. This diverse participation reflects the Chola ethos of allowing individuals of different social and occupational backgrounds to contribute to temple rituals, demonstrating the broad social integration fostered by temple institutions.

Administrative Implications

These inscriptions not only document donations but also serve as valuable sources for understanding the administrative geography of the Chola state. Repeated references to Mangalanadu, Arumolideva Valanadu,²⁶ Ayanthunga Chaturvedimangalam, Matana Manjari Chaturvedimangalam, Pudarkudi and Pudukkudi reflect the clearly defined territorial divisions of the period and the enlargement of the territory by creating new settlements. These place names show that Tiruvidaivasal was firmly embedded within a larger administrative framework that remained stable across generations. The consistent use of these administrative labels across inscriptions of different rulers suggests that the Chola system of nadu-valanadu-

mandalam divisions was effectively maintained and recognised by the local population. Such geographical data helps reconstruct the political landscape and offers insights into settlement patterns, local governance, and temple jurisdiction.

Ritual and Monastic Influence

The inscriptions show a relationship between temple ritual and monastic communities. The references to Thirutondattogaiyan Guhai (cave) foundation by Anaimangalamudaiyan Ariyan Vaduganathan alias Sennavaraiyar show the establishments functioning alongside the temple. These monastic centres were responsible for reciting *Devaram*,²⁷ performing religious ceremonies and preserving sacred traditions.

Their presence reflects a shared religious environment where Siva Brahmanas, Maheswara Aryas, monks and devotees collaborated to uphold ritual practices. The coexistence of temple-based priesthood and monastic orders suggests a spiritually vibrant landscape, where textual recitation, ritual performance and devotional service became complementary aspects of religious life. Such inscriptions highlight the temple's dual identity as both a ritual centre and a hub of knowledge transmission.

Conclusion

The inscriptions so far, we have come across, draw us to conclude that the region Tiruvidavayal was kept under a frequent occupation of people from many sections of life and from many villages surrounding the Puniyanatha swamy temple. From the Chola rule establishes to this extent the power and administration were flourished by a great power. It was continued till the Vijayanagar period and was equally active as that of the Chola period and this is evinced through the various donations being offered in same length and breadth. The division of land system was followed and given a proper elevation to this region and made a tremendous growth through this temple which stood as an apex of the region being surrounded. The dominance or the active role of the lay women in the temple activities show us the economic balance maintained by all gender and the social background.

End Notes:

1. Srinivasa Pillai K. S., *Tamil varalaru*, Part II, Tamil Kudiyarasu, Kumbakonam, 2012, p.179.
2. A.R.E., 08/1918 and Nilakanta Sastri K.A., *The Colas*, University of Madras, 1975, p.53.
3. Padmavathy, *op. cit*, p.92.
4. A.R.E., 29/1918.
5. Padmavathy, *Nannilam Kalvettukal*, Vol 3, Archaeology department, p.106.
6. A.R.E., 32/1918.
7. A.R.E., 10/1918.
8. A.R.E., 14/1918.
9. A.R.E., 26/1918.
10. A.R.E., 16/1918.
11. A.R.E., 18/1918.
12. A.R.E., 11/1918.
13. A.R.E., 23/1918.

14. Padmavathy, *op. cit*, p.96.
15. A.R.E., 25/1918.
16. A.R.E., 21/1918.
17. A.R.E., 13/1918.
18. A.R.E., 12/1918.
19. A.R.E., 20/1918.
20. A.R.E., 27/1918.
21. Padmavathy, *op. cit*, p.106.
22. A.R.E., 28/1918.
23. Padmavathy, *op. cit*, p. 100.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
25. A.R.E., 11/1918.
26. A.R.E., 17/1918.
27. A.R.E., 08/1918.