

Revenue Administration In Erumbeeswara Temple At Thiruverumbur During Chola Period - A Study

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Abstract

India has a rich Architectural heritage spanning over 2000 years, and there are monuments spread across the length and breadth of the country. The geological diversity of the nation provided different materials for the construction of these monuments. The temples in the Tamilnadu are constructed out of granite. The epigraphic records found in a South Indian temple are usually rich in their content and constitute the main contemporary evidence to get an idea of the patronage it received from kings and people alike through the ages, and the dominant role it played in the life of the people. Though most of the inscriptions are usually donative, they incidentally throw much useful and welcome light on the prevailing political social and economic conditions as also the system of temple management and administration. Erumbeeswara temple is one of the oldest temples have more than 49 Chola inscriptions. In this paper an attempt is made to throw light on the Revenue administration of Cholas revealed from the inscriptions of this temple.

Keywords: Inscriptions, Irai, Kani ,ma, kalanju, Kala, Kuruni

Introduction

Temples in all countries and at all times have exercised great influence upon the minds of the people. In India it has helped in the preservation of the best of Hindu traditions, in moulding the lives of the people, and in keeping the bond of unity in a country where there is a wide variation of climatic conditions and where there is a bewildering diversities of customs, dress, and languages.¹ Temples in India originated as places of worship or cult centre, in the centuries immediately before and after the beginning of the Christian era. They were systematically built up as institutions with a focus for all human activities² - social, economic and cultural.

The temple occupied a place of vital importance in the history of medieval South India. It constituted a powerful social and economic entity. There is no doubt that the temple served not only as a place of worship but also as the focus of the material life of the

people. The temple became the center of social life. From the early hours of the morning to late hours of the night, pujas, festivals and special gatherings attracted the people. It held them in its fold heightened their sensory appreciation by the rendering of Thiruppadiyam by Othuvans, and music by the temple musicians, by the exotic colour of the paintings, by the scented perfumes around the place of worship, by the tasty offerings (Prasadams) distributed. Verily all the five senses became cultivated in their fullness in a temple. In the development of temple many elements and their aspects have made the temple a vibrant living force even today. Above all, the temple became a cultural institution of a great eminence, namely, development of man and his environs through good education, assured health, and freedom from penury.³

The Erumbeeswara temple at Thiruverumbur has played an important role as a land holder, consumer of goods and services, employer, banker and the like. The inscriptions

which are engraved on the walls of this temple and other temples found in and around Thiruverumbur provide a mine of information with regard to the socio- economic conditions of the locality.

History of Erumbeeswarar temple

Erumbeeswara temple is located in the distance about 2km from Thiruverumber and about 12kms from Trichy. It is one of the revenue villages in Thiruchirapalli district of India state, Tamil Nadu. Erumbeeswarar Temple is a Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. Hoisted on a 60-foot tall hill, the temple can be reached via a flight of granite steps. Since the temple is on a hill, it is colloquially called "Malai Kovil" or "hill temple". The temple is famous not only for its Dravidian architecture style but also its legend - Lord Shiva is believed to have morphed himself into an anthill and tilted his head at this place to allow other Gods who took the form of ants, to climb up and worship him.⁴ Erumbu means ant and Eswaran refers to Shiva.

One can see that that Shiva lingam is a slanting one along with the marks of ants creeping on the lingam. The temple is one in a long line of temples built by Aditya Chola, of the Chola dynasty, along the banks of the river Kaveri, to memorialize his victory in the Thirupurambiyam battle, over the Pandyas. Because of King Aditya and his Chola ancestry, we see that the temple has a number of inscriptions from the Chola Empire dating back to the 10th century. Because of its historical and religious importance, the temple has been declared a protected monument by the Archaeological Survey of India and is locally commemorated as the "Kailash of South India".⁵ While many festivals are celebrated with full gusto at the temple, the annual festival of Brahmotsavam (May/June) is one of the grandest festivals that is celebrated by the temple and is attended by thousands of devotees from far and near. Along with the images and idols of Shiva and his consort Saurabhya Kudalaambal., one can find granite images of other Gods also, like Lord Ganesha, Lord Murugan, nandi and Navagraha, in the hall that leads to the sanctum.

Inscriptions of the temple

Erumbeeswara temple in its current form was built by the Cholas king Aditya I (871-907 CE). The temple has 49 inscriptions from the Cholas period (850-1280 CE). The inscriptions

numbered 101, 104, 105, 127, 130 and 133 of 1914 are believed to be inscribed during the 5th to 7th year of the reign of Aditya and hence believed to be between 882 and 885 CE. Another set of inscriptions from the Sundara Chola (957-970 CE) period indicate gift of land to maintain four signs of Tirupadigam One another inscription indicates the donation of ten kalanchu (a measure) of gold to the deity by a temple woman in the year 875 CE. A king by name Siruthavur Sembian Veithi Velan from iliyurnadu is believed to have constructed the vimana⁶ (structure over the sanctum); the temple was the only temple that Malik Kafur (1296-1316 CE) could not conquer in 1311 CE, during his South Indian expedition. The temple is a declared monument of the Archaeological Survey of India on account of the inscriptions in the temple.

Social life

A detailed and analytical study of the inscriptions from the temple throw light on the composition of various communities of the Thiruverumbur and reveal the nature of interaction that the temple had with the people of the town like Brahmins, Vellalars, Merchants, Potters, Goldsmiths, Carpenters and Mandradis. The caste was the basis of the social organization under the Cholas society was divided into number of social groups or castes. Each caste was hereditary and constituted an occupational group. Brahmanas occupied a privilege position in the society.⁷ They were exempted from taxes, owned and enjoyed land with full royal support. Their main duties included learning and teaching of the Vedas and performing rituals and ceremonies. Some of them served as chief priests of the temple. The vellalars mentioned in an epigraph of this temple proves that they will be the backbone of the society. Their professions were not only cultivation but also cattle breeding, business, weaving and service to the twice born. They acted as high officials in the Chola administration, particularly, in revenue field. Next to the vellalars, the merchant class formed a vital link in the economic fabric of this place.⁸ There are inscriptions conveying news of endowments to the temples by the trading community. The position of women in the Chola society was of a special significance. They were experts in religious literature and puranas. Property right had been conferred on them. They liberally made endowments to the

temple. The temple epigraphs show in detail the social condition of Tamilnadu during the time of Aditya I, the author of the Erumbeeswara temple at Thiruverumbur.

Revenue Administration

The temple occupied the place of importance in the history of medieval South India. It constituted a powerful economic entity. The temples were not only the place of worship but also the focus of the material life of the people. The Erumbeeswara temple at Thiruverumbur has played an important role as landholder, consumer of goods, employer, banker and the like. The inscriptions which are engraved on the walls of this temple provide a lot of information with regard to the economic condition of the locality.

The temples were maintained with royal benefaction and public patronage. One can understand the economy of the place from the inscriptions relating to the sale and purchase of lands, provision of the irrigation facilities, conduct of pujas and festivals, protection of the property of the temples, the upkeep of the temple premises, the construction of the building and several other works. In short, the Erumbeeswara temple was the centre of economy of Thiruverumbur. The inscriptions in this temple reflects the economy of the town.⁹

More than 49 inscriptions from the temple refer to the land transactions such as purchase, sale, donation of land and laying new streets, designs, remission of taxes to the land attached to the temple, etc. From these one can understand the main aspects of the economy of Thiruverumbur area.

Temple as Bank

Temple treasuries served as local banks. The temples lend money to private bodies and village assemblies for cultivation, with or without security. Parents in order to perform the marriage of their daughters drew as loan money from the temple treasury. In times of distress temples helped the people and the unrealisable debts were rounded up by the purchase of the debtor's land.¹⁰

Temple as a big consumer

The temples are big consumers of milk and milk products, flowers, rice and other consumer items for various services connected with worship. Since pujas and festivals in the temples have prospered in recent times, there is

an ever increasing demand for coconuts, sandal wood, rice, turmeric, incense, leaves, flowers, lights, ghee, salt, pepper, areca nut, betel leaves, oil, mustard, pulses, sugar, plantain, curd, camphor etc., There have been donations for these articles to the temples by many philanthropists. The inscriptions of Erumbeeswara temple at Thiruverumbur mention that there have been generous endowments of paddy, rice, vegetables, edible oil and other articles for nivethanam. Tirupallitamam, tirumanjanam, and burning of lamps.¹¹

Taxation

Every Government has its revenue as its life line. The Government gets its revenue through several ways and sources. One of them is the various taxes collected from the people. There are sufficient evidences to show that the tax was collected in the Sangam Age.¹² Though the word tax is not directly mentioned the word, Irai denoted tax. In those times land tax was fixed on the basis of fertility of the land, irrigational facilities and the relationship of the tiller of the soil and the land owner. From an inscription of Erumbeeswara temple the various taxes prevalent during the Cholas period are learned. They were called Nilavari, Piravari, minpattam, tari-irai, tattar pattam, kadi-ayam, and Arasuperu.¹³

Units of Land Measurement

In order to collect the above mentioned taxes, the land, particularly, tax land was measured by different units called vatika or veli, kani, kuli, and kol. A basic measurement for measuring land was through Adikol which means rod of Adi (equal to the present day one foot) Inscription mentions the name panniradikol the rod of 12 feet length. One square of panniradikol form 1 kuli and hundred kuli formed one ma. Based on the one foot measurement, measurements of lands were made and different units were formed with a specific name for each unit. They are discussed one by one here under.

Vatika or Veli:

Vatika is a Sanskrit term representing a unit measure of land. It corresponds to veli, a unit measure of length. Veli was divided into 1/2, 1/4, 1/8, 1/20, 1/80 and 1/320.

Kani

Kani is a unit. It is $1/80^{\text{th}}$ of a veli . One veli is equal to 20 ma and one ma is equal to four kani. One hundred kuli also formed one kani.

Kuli:

Kuli a popular tem used even now in Tamilnadu, is a unit of measurement for measuring land. Kuli also means a pit but in this context it is to be taken only as a unit of measurement. It is generally considered that it is an area spreading over 10feet by 2 ½ feet square or 10 feet by 2 feet.

In their period there were several units of measurement. They were,

16 chan	-	1 kol
18 kol	-	
1 kuli		
100 kuli	-	
1 ma		
1 ma	-	
4 kani		
1 kani	-	
4 mundrikai		
1 mundrikai	-	
1/320 veli		
240 kuli	-	
1 pataka		
20 ma	-	
1 veli		

The inscriptions of Erumbeeswara temple belonging to the Chola period describe land measurement as Mukkal, Kani, Ma, Mundrikai, Kuli, and Veli.¹⁴

Coins

The general terms to denote coins were kasu, panam, achchu, tiraman, pon varadham, madai, kalanju, akkam etc. They meant different denominations were also there in the above said designations. No specific difference has been noticed in respect of the metal of the coins in inscriptions. Some inscriptions specifically mention the denomination of the coins along with the metal which is invariably gold. However, copper coins were in circulation in large numbers during the Chola period. It appears that the general name for the copper coin was Kasu.¹⁵

It is not at all possible to know the correct weight of these coins with respect to their denominations. It is also not possible to identify and associate at present the available coins with their respective names and denominations. More important among the coins were their denominations which had a

uniform system of weight and purity of metal. The main denomination was the kalanju. Kalanju was equal to twenty manjadi and onemanjadi was equal to two kurunis and one kuruni was equal to two grains. Thus, a Kalanju consisted of eighty grains.

Weights and Measures

The standard weight systems seem to be the manjadi, kalanju and palam during the Chola period. The grain measures that were in vogue in the temple in various times were the kalam, tuni, paddakku, kuruni and nali. The Erumbeeswara temple enjoyed the privilege of receiving the regular supply of different things like milk, butter, ghee, oils, etc for daily use. The liquid measures that were in usage in the temple were nali, uri, ullakku, allakku, and sevedu.¹⁶ The ullakku was a vessel for measuring the oil.

Liquid and grain measures

2 Sevidu	=	1 Pidi
5 Sevidu	=	1Alakku
2 Alakku	=	1 Uri
2 Uri	=	1Nali
8 Nali	=	1 Kuruni
2 Kuruni	=	1 Padakku
2 Padaku	=	1 Tuni or Kadi
3 Tuni	=	1 Kalam

Thus, Erumbeeswara temple at Thiruverumbur has become an integral part of social and economic lives of the people. On account of the temple having economic production and irrigational rights, it was in a position to dominate the life of the village. From the discussion, it can be seen that this temple became the centre of people's activities and the temple played a vital role in the growth of socio-economic aspects of their life.

END NOTES:

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