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TIRUVAALEESVARAM – A TEMPLE OF MERCHANT’S CAPITAL



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ABSTRACT:

The temple Tiruvaaaleesvaram is situated in the present Tiruvaalikandpuram town of Permbalur District of Tamil Nadu. This temple contains 128 inscriptions, among them, 97 are belonging to Chola period¹. The temple has 7 tiers magnificent gopuram. It has garpagraha, Arthamandapam, Mahamandapam, Thirchchurru Maligai (Circumbulatory mansion) and smaller shrines. It has two circumbulatory forts².

KEYWORDS: temple Tiruvaaaleesvaram , Paleolithic period, economic currents.

INTRODUCTION:

The situation of the temple Tiruvaalikandapuram had a history beginning from Paleolithic period. The soil of this place was dry, and edible oil seeds are well grown. The town Vaalikandapuram remained to be a junction place of many ways to which the oil monger merchants had largely inhabited, even in the past period. This study argues that the temple Thiruvaaleesvaram was the off spring of economic currents, preferably by the merchant’s capital.

The origin of the temple:

The Stalapuranam³ of the temple says that the temple was founded by Vaali, the king of monkey tribe referred in the puranam Ramayanam. This suggestion does not hold the ground, because Sthalapuranam is a recent fabricated account and would not come under the category of evidences.

Then comes the Sangam literature datable to BCE 300-300 CE⁴. This literature identifies one geographical area by name Kandiram. This literature mentions that that area was ruled by the chieftain families Kandirakko, and Vichchiko. There is some argument saying that, Kandirako had formed the Vaalikandapuram, and the temple. This supposition is derived on the basis of the resemblances of the names Kandiram, and Vaalikanda. This supposition also does not hold the ground because there is no conclusion existed between Vaali and Kandiram.

The third supposition about the foundation of the temple is as follows. The place Vaalikandapuram is situated within a nadu territory vannadu in Chola time. This vannadu was ruled by the chieftain families namely Vannaduudaiyar. As there are many donations made by these chieftains are recorded in the temple- L. Thiyagarajan, postulates that any one of the chieftains of the Vannaduudaiyar family might have founded this temple⁵. This supposition is nearer to the truth, but not the truth at all, because, there is no connection existed between vaali and the chieftains of Vannaduudaiyar. Hence this supposition may not be also possible.

Before to find out the founder of the temple an analysis of the location of the temple Vaalikandapuram becomes an essential one.

In the previous pages, it has been mentioned that the place Vaalikandapuram remained to be the town of merchants, and especially the oil mongers (Sankarpadi)⁶. Among them one by name vaali had founded the town and the temple itself. This is supported by the earliest inscription of the temple, which narrates that money endowment was received by the oil mongers (Sankarapadiyar) which intimates that the origin of the temple is related to the oil mongers.

SOCIO-POLITICAL SITUATION AT THE FORMATION OF THE TEMPLE

1. At the time of the emergence of the town Vaalikandapuram, the surrounding agricultural communities had grouped themselves as to call Vannadu to which a chieftain controlled the territory emerged.
2. At the time of the founding of the temple, erstwhile the chieftain family the Cholas had established their independent rule emerging from the status of chieftain to the emperor⁷.
3. It was a period of the emergence of the merchants with rich in wealth, and high in social status⁸.

MERCHANT’S CAPITAL

Earlier it has been illustrated that the origin of the temple was a compulsion on the part of the merchants, especially the oil mongers for the foundation. So, the first donor of the temple was Arumpakkilan Sattan Parantakan⁹ while the title kilan identifies that he was a land lord, another title of him Sattan indicates that he was a merchant what it implies is, a original merchant. What the name

implies is, that he was originally a merchant had turned to be a land lord and made donation to this temple. But what he donated was not the land, but the gold indicates that, the individual was the merchant. This type of support by the merchant was the important factor for the temple. The temple was merchant capital’s own creation is further illustrated by the name of God itself. Usually all the deities had particular affiliation to their location. The inscriptions record the title Udaiyar meaning to possessor or landlord of that locality for referring to God. For example an inscription found in Sivakasi, while referring to God mentions ‘Venbaikudinattu Venbaikudi Udaiyar Pandieswaramudaiya Nayanar’¹⁰.

The meaning of the inscriptions’ sentence is as follows

- a. Vikramapandeswaramudaiya Nayanar – The temple and God’s name.
- b. Udaiyar – land lord
- c. Udaiyar of venbaikudi – land lord of the village Venbaikudi.

Thus, it is seen that the inscriptions had a pattern to inscribe the details of deity and the temple. First they mention the location, then, the temple and lastly God.

But this pattern is not visible in the recording of God for the temple Tiruvaaleesvaram. Inscriptions simply mention God’s name as Tiruvaaleesvarathu Alvar, or Tiruvaaleesvarathu Mahedevan. Neither title Udaiyar, nor the village is name found. This means is that God is known only by the temple, and He was not the lord of any town. The practical meaning is that temple had no territorial affinity, or it was not God to a particular village, or to a particular town, but to a particular communities i.e. Sankarapadiyar (oil mongers).

For a long time, that is from the first Cholakking Aditya I 885 CE to 1219, Rajaraja III God is simply named as nayinar only with reference to the temple Tiruvaaleeswaram. In the year 1219 CE only for the first time God was referred as Vaalikandapurathu Udaiyar Tiruvaaleeswara mudaiyar Nayanar¹¹. This means that God had some properly rights in the town Vaalikandapuram only in 1219 CE. Then God got lands in agricultural community area, Vannadu. So, an inscription refers God as Vannattu Valiswaramudaya Nayanar¹². But this Vannattu attribution is not strictly followed by all the other inscriptions. They refer God as Vaaleeswarar only. This indicates that, God’s affiliation was strictly related to the community and not to the territory.

Increase of God’s divinity and thronging of different social status people

Initially the temple was confined to a particular community, and so no grants were made during the beginning period of Aditya I. During the period of Aditya I only one grant was made that too by a merchant cum land lord. Apart from that there was no grant. The divinity nucleus of God had spread too fast and in the subsequent period of Chola king Parantaka I, thirty three grants were made to the temple. Among them the foremost one was made by the chieftain Vannadu Udaiyar¹³. He was the first to grant land to the temple. The purpose of this grant mentioned in the inscription makes it clear about the relationship between the chieftain and God. The purpose was the lineage of Vannaduudaiyar should heighten (kul’Vannaduudaiyar kulam onka’). This indicates that, the chieftain had worshiped God as his lineage deity. Moreover Vannaduudaiyar had constantly given patronage to the temple, until the period of Kulothunga III. Another chieftain miladuudaiyar was the donor to this temple. The God’s fame had motivated even the Chola kings family. Rajadita I, s/o. Parantaka I had taken keen interest to get the grace of God. What he did was the deed of Brahmanical tradition. He inhabited many Brahmins for the service to the temple, with the grant of the villages, to the Brahmins.

Next to the ruling families, the agrarian communities of Vannadu also made contributions to

the temple. They constructed the surrounding wall. Thus, the temple which was started with merchant was now in the hands of agricultural communities. The name and fame of God had heightened, and within the period Kulothunga III God was considered to be as the boon giver for the birth of the child. At that time he was called by the name Brahmapur Iswaran, An inscription of Kulothunga III dated to 1207 CE records that a land lord Suttamallan Jayakonda Chola Vannaduudaiyar, had gone to the temple, and at the feet of God, he brayed for a child for which he pledged to present gold ornament (Pattam). After this prayer, he got the child, so, he presented a whole village taxes to God as his presentation. Succeeding in the period of Pandyar, Vijayanagar ruler, and Nayakar, the temple used to receive the grant from the officers.

However among the various donors, the community of merchants, especially Sankarpadiyar, had showered their money to the temple, Inscription record 47 grants of them. Among them the merchant Tirukovalur Arumpakkilan Sattan Parantakan has donated gold to the temple in CE. 885. Inscriptions record the same person as the donor in 96814. So the same person had donated twice with a gap of eighty three years. The oil mongers of Sankarapadiyar of Vaalikandapuram liberally made donations. Not only from Vaalikandapuram, the oil mongers from Chola’s capital Tanjore had visited the temple and made donations¹⁵ Apart from the local merchants, also the merchant guilds had become donors to the temple and made donations as mentioned by Kneeth. R. Hall.

CONCLUSION

This study has identified that the temple Valeeswaran was the offspring of merchant’s capital. The merchants, especially oil mongers had settled in the town Valikandapuram a place for the plantation of oil seeds. These merchants, in order to conduct trade created the temple during the times of Chola king Aditya I. Although the temple was created for merchant class, soon the social set up agricultural communities Nadu, the chieftains, Vannaduudaiyar, and the Prince of Chola king had diverted their resources for the prosperity of the temple. As this area breed slow population, God was made to be Brahmapuriswaran i.e. one who gives children to the childless families. However the merchant communities like Sankarapadiyar, vaniyar had shown great interest in promoting the temple. Not only the sectors of the village, but also merchant guides, also took interest in patronizing the temple. Thus the temple Tiruvaleesvaran a religious centre was the outcomes of the merchant’s capital.

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