



Nagaram Assembly Administration Gleaned By Incerptions

Mr. A. Dhanasekaran^{1*}, Dr.P.Rajan², Dr. G. Paranthaman³

^{1*}Ph.D., Research Scholar, (Full Time), Dept. of History, Annamalai University.

²Professor of History, Dept. of History, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar.

³Assistant Professor, Dept. of History, Alagappa University, Karaikudi.

***Corresponding Author:** Mr. A. Dhanasekaran

*Ph.D., Research Scholar, (Full Time), Dept. of History, Annamalai University.

Abstract

Temples were the pivots of all human activities during ancient and middle ages. The temples occupied a very important place in the social, economic, religious cultural and administration life of the people. The monarchs of Tamil Country the Pallavas, the Pandyas, the Cholas, the Vijayanagar rulers the chieftains and so on followed the art of erecting structural temples from seventh and eighth century onwards. The members of the royal families, queens the traders and administrative officials also played a prominent role in temple constructions, renovations, enlargement, patronisation and administration. Gifts were offered to all temples from all the irrespective of traders and trade guilds. Gift of villages, gift of gold, gift of lands, ornaments, money and livestock were common endowments of the traders and trade guilds. Apart from the rulers, the chieftains and the administrative officials, the merchants, the trade guides, made liberal contributions to the temples, which are attested by the epigraphs. This paper throws light on Nagaram, the traders urban settlement and nagaram assembly in a detailed maner.

Keywords: *Vala nadus, kottams, gramas, ur, sabha, mandapas, Pujas, kalanju of gold and mandapas.*

Introduction

The lands donated to the temples were either exempted from tax or made tax free. In short, as a nucleus, they gathered round themselves all that was best in the arts of civilised existence, and regulated them with humanness borne of the spirit of Dharma. Through proper administration, temples also proved to be the centre of all administrative, its activities namely landlord, employer, consumer of goods, bank, educational centre, feeding centre, museum, hospital and public gathering. Among the administrative activities this paper through light on the *sabha* of nagarams and its administration in details manner.

Provincial Administration

For the administrative convenience, the extensive Cholas empire was divided into several *mandalas* or provinces, *Vala nadus* or districts, *kottams* or taluks and finally *gramas* or villages. The head of a *mandala* was the Viceroy or Governor, who was either a close relative of the King or a descendant of its dispossessed royal house, had a large number of officials under him to look after the administration in each manadalas. In the reign of Aditya I Chola, there was only one *mandalam* called Chola *mandalam*. Later on, Thoindaimandalam was added to Chola kingdom. The *mandalams* were again divided into *Vala nadus*. The *vala nadus* were sub divided into several *nadus* and each *nadu*.

The same system of provincial administration was also followed by the Pandyas.¹ the provincial administration underwent a change under the Vijayanagara rulers. During the Vijayanagar period all these subdivisions disappeared and only the *mandalams alone existed*. The chief of these divisions we're referred to as Mahamandaleswarar² by them.

Roll of Nagaram Assemblies

For illustration an inscription⁷ mentions a gift of a perpetual lamps with lamp stand and 96 sheep. This gift of 96 sheep for lighting the perpetual lamp to the primal deity Tiruvirattana Nattu Maha Deva of Adhiraja Mangalaya Puram. by one Vellikettan Piramalai, a resident of the place encrusted *Nagarattar*. The Nagarattar received the gift of 96 sheep and agreed to light the lamp to the principle daily. The *sabha, of Nagaram* one among the administration authorities of this temple also authorized to maintain the daily *Pujas* and maintained the gift.⁸

For illusion an inscription⁹ of Rajendra I Chola issued in his 23rd regnal year refers a gift of one veli of land for food offerings and provision for garlands to the primal deity by ur Sabha of Kattup pakkam in Ananu nadu of Panaiyur nadu to Narayanan Rajaraja of Vanjivur in Puliyur nadu of Arulmolideva Valanadu in CholaMandalam for conducting daily

Pujas.

Another inscription¹⁰ of Kulothunga I Chola issued in his 32nd regnal year found on a pillar in the Arthamandapa in front of the central shrine Thiruvadigai Veerattaneswarar temple registers a gift of a 96 sheep for two perpetual lamp to be burnt

the perpetual lamp to the primal deity of this temple. This inscription also refers that the Tiruvannaligai *ur* sabha under took to burn the light. The donor was a merchant of the Gangaikonda Chola puram Perunderu in Mudikonda Chola puram. Another inscription¹¹ of Kulothunga I Chola issued in his 44th regnal year found on the west wall of the Madappalli Thiruvadigai Veerattaneswarar temple registers a gift of 96 sheep for a lighting a perpetual lamp for the main deity Udaiyar *Tiruvirattanam* Udaiyar of Adiraja Mangalya Puram of Anmur Nadu in Tirumunippadi of Gangaikonda Chola Valandu by one Pichchan Tiruvekadudaiyan of Kalathur Kottam of Jayankonda chola Mandalam. The gift was entrusted to Tiruvannaligai ur Sabha for the maintenance of the regular lightening of the perpetual lamp.

Another inscription¹² of Kulothunga I Chola issued in his 44th regnal year found on the south wall of the first prakara of the Thiruvadigai temple registers a gift of 200 *kuli* of land for establishment of Madapuram for the *vagisan* mutt attached to the temple. The gift of land was endowed by the ur Sabha of Kanichchapakkam of Kilammur Nadu in Tirumunaijadi of Gangaikonda Chola Mandalam. In addition to that the *Ur sabha* of Panaippakkam also donated half *veli* of land to the same mutt of this temple. The *ur sabha* of Panaippakkam is none other than the present Patam Pakkam. Thus the ur sabhas also made liberal endowments to development of the Temple administration.

Another inscription¹³ of Kulothunga I Chola issued in his 48th regnal year dated to his unknown regnal year found on the west wall of the *madappalli* of this temple registers a gift of 96 cows for lighting a perpetual lamp. This livestock endowment was given by one Kerla Raja alias Kiliyur Udaiyar Velananga of Arur Kurram of Nittavinodha *Vala nadu*. The gift was entrusted to the Tiruulnaligai Sabha of this temple.

Another inscription¹⁴ of Vikrama Chola issued in his 4th regnal year found on the third pillar of the mandapa in front of the Saranarayana Perumal temple registers a gift of 750 *kuli* land as tax free for conducting Ardhajama *Pujas* to Govinda Vinnagar temple at Adhiraja Mangalya Puram in perpetuity. The record also refers sale of a piece of land by the Perunkuri *Sabha* of the Brahmadiyam of Chiruputtur to meet out the shortage of Sabha Viniyogam. It reveals that the Ur sabha manage the shortage of sabha vinoyogam the duty.

For illusion a inscription¹⁵ of Vikrama Chola issued in his 6th regnal year found on another pillar of the *Mandapa* in front of the Saranarayana Perumal temple registers a gift of 750 *kuli* land for conducting Ardhajama *Pujas* for Govinda Vinnagar at Adhiraja Mangalya Puram in Kilammur nadu. The record also refers decision of *Mahasabha* of Akkalanenomati *Chaturvedimangalam*, which sold a land to meet out the shortage of taxes to the paid to the temple.

Another inscription¹⁶ of Vikrama Chola issued in his 7th regnal year found on a pillar of the Mandapa in front of the Saranarayana Perumal temple registers a gift of a land to meet this spiritual offering on a permanent basis. The record also refers to the convening of the *Mahasabha* of Ranadhira *Chaturvedimangalam* in the Nyayaparipalana Vinnagar Alar temple for taking a decision to sell a portion of the land to meet the shortage of the taxes of the previous year. The record also refers the purchase of a land by a merchant community of Adhiraja Mangalya Puram.

Collective Responsibility and Cooperative Endurance

The co-operative endeavours of *ur assembly* and temple servants in temple affairs is mentioned in a record¹⁷ of Parantaka I Chola. Therefore, it becomes obvious that the entire local bodies namely *ur* assembly, Mahasabha, Brahmadeya *sabha* and the servants of the temples cooperated in common matters. This shows their collective responsibility and cooperative endurance of the temple servants.

Wide Range of Function of The Bodies

The local bodies paid special attention to temple administration. Regarding the issues of temple administration, the Kings issued orders to these bodies. Local bodies administrated local affairs. They discharged a wide range of administration functions. They included regulation, supervision and cultivation of lands, management of irrigation works, collections remission of taxes, maintained law and order render, justice,¹⁸ conduct trade, Supervise weight and measures and management of charities and temples. The inscriptions of this temple bear evidence to the involvement of these local bodies in the administration of this temple.

Powers and Functions of Nagaram Assemblies, Local Bodies

They were responsible to the people of the village in dealing with anything affecting them. Ultimately, they were responsible to the King also. In the temple administration, the local bodies of the *urar* enjoyed certain powers, performed certain functions and had certain responsibilities too. They had a wide range of functions with regard to lands, their cultivation, disposal, sale and purchase, levy and collection of taxes and even the remission of dues. Though their influence in temple administration was unlimited. They had also to give certain undertakings, which gave some restrictions on their enjoyment of various powers. They were held responsible for some of the difficulties in the temple affairs.

Powers and Functions of Nagaram Sabhas

The *sabhas* enjoyed unlimited powers with regard to the day-to-day life of the villages and the temple administration. One such sphere of its influence was the management of charitable endowments of the temples, which were entrusted to the

respective *sabhas* of the villages. The *sabha* was either directly in charge of them or left under its supervision. Endowments were left under the safe custody of the *sabha*. another record¹⁹ of the fifteenth regnal year of Parantaka I chola registers the gift of 96 sheep, which was left under the custody of the *sabha* of Thiruvamattur for conducting certain services in the temples, the gift of gold was left under the care of the *sabha*. Another record²⁰ of the 41st regnal year of Parantaka I Chola found at Thiruvamattur informs a donation of 20 *kajanju of gold* by Chilaiyan Vadugan and Chettangai to the *sabha* of Thiruvamattur for lamps to be burnt in this temple. The *sabha* received the charity and accepted to measure out the stipulated quantity of ghee.

Sheep gifted to the temples for burning lamps were also left under the custody of the *sabha*.²¹ Those, who protected the charity were instructed to follow the stipulated conditions strictly. Obstruction to charity was severely dealt with. Thus, the *sabha* played a unique role in the administration of temples. Thus, it is the duty of the *sabha* to keep the amount as a permanent investment, so that the capital remained intact always. The interest accruing from the capital amount alone could be diverted for various offerings.

The Nagaram

The Nagaram another important administrative division was the nagaram, which had greater share in the temple administration. Nagaram was the local assembly of merchant guilds. It functioned in every major trading centre of any importance. Located in market towns²², the nagaram, appears to have functioned effectively in co-ordination with the *ur*, the mahasabha and the subsequent major divisions. Membership to this nagaram assembly was open to people of traders and guilds of different castes. For, many people of diverse castes including the Brahmins engaged themselves in commerce. Therefore, it is said that caste was not a barrier to the admission of members in the nagaram.²³ For instance, Mani Sankaranarayanan, a Brahmana is mentioned as a *nagarattan* in an inscription of Maranjadayian found in the Ayyanar Temple at Kalugumalai.²⁴

The Nagaram had keen interest in the Construction and Expansion of Temples

The nagarams had various committees to look after the business. To implement the decisions and record their transactions, the nagaram had accountants known as *nagara kanakku*.²⁵ From the multifarious functions discharged, it is possible to suggest that *nagaram* was an influential body. It even enjoyed delegated rights of administrative autonomy.²⁶ Records portray the rule of nagarams in the local administration including the affairs of temples. The mercantile people made lavish endowments and gifts of various kinds. Gift of land by them was a common feature. A record²⁷ dated in the 25th regnal year of Rajaraja III Chola states a gift of land by a merchant Vannakkan Malaiyan of Thiruvamattur for burning perpetual lamp. The attention of the trading guild was drawn in the construction of temples also. These instances show their keen interest in the construction and expansion of temples.

The nagarams of different trading centers had undertaken the management of temples and their charities. They had received the gifts intended for temple service. Money and gold were entrusted with them for different purposes. Land was also endowed with the nagarams for the same purpose.²⁸ With the gift under the supervision of the nagarams, various temple services were performed. Gold was gifted by them to provide lamp services in the temples. It records the various measures taken by the nagaram for temple services. To meet these obligations, the proceeds of impost on certain export articles of merchandise were gifted to the temples.

It further elaborates that in years of drought or flood, a share based on crop assessment should be paid. From this, it is known that the nagaram got the right to regulate the share from the produce to the temples. In addition, the nagaram engaged in leasing out temple lands. Unoccupied temple lands were converted into arable lands by the nagaram. For this, in certain areas, waste lands, overgrown with shrubs and trees, were sold out.²⁹ The vendees were to reclaim the land and to pay the specified quantity of grain to the temple. Thus, the above instances furnish the proper care bestowed on the temple administration by the nagaram.

Another inscription³⁰ of Kopperunjinga deva II Kadavarya dated to his 16th regnal year found on the north wall of the Madappali registers a gift of land in Chiruvakur in Chendamangalapattu. The record also mentioned land measurements namely *ma*, *kani*, *araikkani*, *muntrigal* etc in detailed manner. This record also refers the *donnar*, the chief of the *Stanattar* of the Temple.

Another inscription³¹ of Jatavarman alias Vira Pandya I deva dated to his 6th regnal year found on the west wall of the in front of the Nataraja shrine of this Temple registers a gift of land in the village kilai Arumbakkam by purchase. From one Varadaraja Vilupparaiyar by one Manrirkkunikkum Perumal alias Dipattaraiyan, the headman of Cholakula Vallinallur in Pattanpakka nadu, Rajaraja vala nadu offering cooked dough, the Kali to the Gods of the Temple of Tiruvadigai.

Another inscription³² of Jatavarman alias Vira Pandya deva I dated to his 8th regnal year found on the southern entrance of the Mandapa of this Temple. Registers a gift of land Tirunamattukkani by Anumanulan Suriyadevar alias Kongarayar. The land originally belonged to a Pullali Velan Manattukkiniyan alias Kanakarayan of Chola Kulavallinallur, who was administering Naduvil Mandalam during the reign of Sundara Pandya. Then it was taken charge by the *Stanattar* from the month of *Tai* in the eighth year of King Perumal Vira Pandya.

In the concluding part from the above study, it is evident that the day-to-day affairs of the different region and localities were entrusted to various local self-governing bodies. As the whole social order was centered around a spiritual axis, which was represented by the temple, the King was very much interested in their maintenance. An orderly maintenance of temple was a reflection of an orderliness of the society. The many lands, village, gold and other gifts donated to the temples were naturally left under the charge of these village assemblies. Besides, this, the village assemblies co-operated in looking after the needs and necessities of the temples. Under their guardianship and protection, the temples flourished greatly.

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