

Endowments of Keezhur Veerataneshwarar Temple with Special Reference to Rajendra Chola I Inscriptions

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Abstract: Religion has influenced the socio-economic setting of Sri Veerataneshwarar temple and the purpose of religion is realized only through its cults, sects, and administration. Sri Veerataneshwarar temple located at Keezhur has properties worth several lakhs by way of munificent donations by philanthropists. The temple is located in a place called Keelur or Kizhairyur in Tirukovilur. Tirukovilur is at a distance of about 40 km from Thiruvannamalai and from Villupuram it is about 37 km. The principal deity of this temple is Sri Veeratteswarar, Sri Andhakaanthakan. Ambal called the devotees Sri Sivananthavalli and Sri Periyanyagi. This temple Theertham is (Holy water) the Thenpennai River. This paper focuses on Rajendra Chola I in his endowments of Keezhur Veerataneshwarar temple in a detailed manner.

Keywords: Gift, Donation, Kalanju, Veli.

Introduction

Religion is an integral part of human life. It has been pointed out by Arnold Toynbee, that the study of history should be subordinated to the study of religious history, "for religion, after all, is the serious business of the human race." Since religion has influenced the socio-economic setting of Sri Veerataneshwarar temple and since the purpose of religion is realized only through its cults, sects, and administration. Sri Veerataneshwarar temple located at Kizhur has properties worth several lakhs by way of munificent donations by philanthropists.¹ These properties help the temple maintain itself properly and efficiently. The endowments have been properly supervised and maintained over the years. The income is recovered duly through the years. So that daily pujas and the annual festivals are properly performed. Administration of any temple is an art. A very efficient administrative machinery is necessary to run the affairs and maintain the properties of the temple in the proper manner as the royal dynasties of those days built several temples and donated liberally for their maintenance.²

Location of the Temple

The temple is located in a place called Keelur or Kizhairyur in Tirukovilur. Tirukovilur is at a distance of about 40 km from Thiruvannamalai and from Villupuram it is about 37 km. The principal deity of this temple is Sri Veeratteswarar, Sri Andhakaanthakan. Ambal called the devotees Sri Sivananthavalli and Sri Periyanyagi. This temple Theertham is (Holy water) the Thenpennai River.³

Religious Activities

The religious activities of Sri Veerataneshwarar temple have increased, the devotees visiting the temple complex have also increased in number, and with an increase in its resources, the scope of the activities of the temple has expanded. This also has necessitated the installation of proper administrative

machinery to manage the endowments and charities. The administration of the temple has employed a large number of people. It afforded ample opportunities for employment to the people of the locality. They served the temple in various capacities performing jobs of assessing the religious function as well as.⁴

Administration

The central administration was in the hands of the ruler. He ruled over an extensive empire. Kingship was hereditary. Generally, the ruler selected his eldest son as heir apparent. As the head of the state, the king enjoyed enormous powers. But he was a benevolent despot. The king was more concerned about the people who considered him the representative of god on the earth.⁵

The Cholas rulers administered their extensive kingdoms with the assistance of ministers; the ministry was an advisory body. It assisted the rulers, the council of ministers, and another high official in maintaining close association with the King. So they were called *Udankuttatars*.⁶ The advisory body consisted of *Pirundaram*⁷ and *Sirudaram*⁸.

The royal patronage

The rulers of Tamil Nadu built many temples throughout their domain and introduced systematic administrative machinery in them. The royal patronage and royal control helped the temples establish themselves. They cherished that it was their pious duty to protect these religious edifices as these led them to heavenly abode. That on the reason why the kings as temporal heads of the state and the priestly class upon ritual heads jointly undertook to propagate temple culture. As the kings were patrons of temple culture, their control of temple affairs was more custodial rather than managerial. It is held that their policy was one of non-interference in the internal affairs of the temples.⁹ It indicates that they granted more autonomy to temple administration. They interfered only when their attention was drawn to certain problems which needed royal intervention. That was why Burton Stein argues that the powers and functions of the state were custodial rather than regulative, magi co-ritualistic rather than managerial.¹⁰ Non-interference in internal affairs means that the state acted as the custodian rather than as manager. In other words, the rulers appear to have enjoyed certain supervisory control over the temple affairs, that too in some peculiar situations. Even then, the king was held responsible for whatever happened in the realm.¹¹ Without royal support, temples could not flourish on their limited resources. Therefore, the kings were expected to have their supervisory control over the affairs of the temples for their smooth functioning. Royal patronage tended to increase in tune with the expansion of temples and with their multifarious activities and functions. Even if they had extended their influence over temples, it was by way of their hereditary right to protect the land and the people by abiding by the local customs, conventions, and traditions. This is evident from their extensive land endowments, the generous tax concessions, and other charitable activities that they had initiated. With the multiplicity of temple functionaries and the increase in their economic activities, with vast landed property and endowments culled *devadanas* and the grand remuneration to the servants, there were religious functions and special services known as *sandhi* in their names.¹² For instance, *Kondama Nayaka* visited the temple and made gifts for festivals and repairs in the temple.¹³

On the day of the royal visit, the temples and their premises were swept, decorations made *and pujas* were conducted regularly. To win royal admiration and favor, the various temple staff performed their duties with devotion and dedication. Order was reflected in every act of the temple authorities. The royal visits thus created a sense of fear and responsibility among the temple authorities concerned. This paper focuses on Rajendra Chola I in his endowments of Keezhur Veerataneshwarar temple in a detailed manner.

Rajendra Chola I

Rajendra Chola I (regnal years 1012-1044), the son of Rajaraja Chola I, is undoubtedly one of the greatest Emperors the Tamil Land, India or even the World has ever produced. His successful

expeditions, in the neighboring Kingdoms of Thamizhagam, as far as the Ganges, surpassing the Kalingas and conquering the Palas, earned him the title – ‘Gangai Konda Chozhan’ – ‘The Chola who conquered the Ganges’. He learned political and economic warfare from his accomplished and triumphant Father- Rajaraja I, the Great. Rajendra, I proved that none other than him could have taken the victorious Baton of the Cholas, not only to the neighborhood but to the several countries in Southeast Asia as well. His successful overseas expeditions documented in his inscriptions, prove his mettle as a Skillful Warrior, a Tactful Administrator, and the most striking feature of all, a Maritime Champion – Political and Economic.¹⁴

Tamil Kings and their zeal for constructing Temples is a well-acknowledged fact. Temples of Tamilzhagam/Tamilagam are not only religious entities, but storehouses of history. The passion with which the rulers – Pallavas, Cholas, Pandyas, or their Vassal Kings, have transformed Temples into Architectural wonders, can be felt in every Temple of South India.¹⁵ But, the credit of engineering the temples into Massive Monuments with Intricate Sculptural Marvels, unable to capture the total essence of the masterpiece, even in the best technologically advanced cameras of the present times, is only one of the several distinguished achievements of the Cholas.¹⁶

Gift of 100 Goats

The first inscription of Rajendra Chola I issued in his 3rd regnal year 1015 C.E. found on the south wall of the mandapa in Kizhur, Veerataneswarar temple refers to Rama Mummudicholar, the son of Irajasekaran Umai Nangaiyar, who was the wife of Patalagan Rama and the wife of Patalagan Rama, who was the wife of Deva Miladudiyar and the daughter of Kanthiyathiraiyar, donated 100 goats to light a lamp.¹⁷

Gift of 96 Sheep

The second inscription of Rajendra Chola I issued in his 5th regnal year 1017 C.E. found on the south wall of the Kizhur, Veerataneswarar temple refers to the gift of 96 sheep for lighting a Nanda lamp. The endowment made by one individual Pulyambakkatu Kulathuzhan Koothan Karumanika Keralantha Moovenda Velan to the Thirukoilur Udaiya Mahadevar.¹⁸

Donation of Land

Third inscription of Rajendra Chola I issued in his 6th regnal year 1018 C.E. found on the north wall of the sanctorum in Kizhur, Veerataneswarar temple refers to the donation of land. The first king is cut in half between lines 24,25.¹⁹

Sale of Bramadeya Land

The fourth inscription of Rajendra Chola I issued in his 6th regnal year 1018 C.E. found on the north wall of the Kizhur, Veerataneswarar temple refers to the sale of bramadeya land for the principal deity.²⁰

Gift a Golden Plate

The fifth inscription of Rajendra Chola I issued in his 6th regnal year 1018 C.E. found on the east wall of the Kizhur, Veerataneswarar temple refers to the gift of a golden plate of twenty-one-fourth weight, and Rama's son-in-law, Mutikonda Chola, one twenty-three-and-a-half-fourth of a golden article.²¹

Gift of Land

The sixth inscription of Rajendra Chola I issued in his 6th regnal year 1018 C.E. found on the east wall of the Kizhur, Veerataneswarar temple refers to One thousand nine thousand and twenty pits of land was given to Veeratanesuvar as a land grant to the three Nandavanakudis who were working there. His

name is Ilamangala Mudiyaan Nichal Sriyarur of Arulmozhi Deva Valanatu Mangala Nattu of Chola Mandal.²²

Gold and Silver Articles

The seventh inscription of Rajendra Chola I issued in his 6th regnal year 1018 C.E. found on the north wall of the mandapa in Kizhur, Veerataneswarar temple refers to under the supervision of Ilamangalamudayan Nichal Yarur of Thiruveerattanam's Mahadeva Sri Bandaram, the gold and silver items belonging to the temple were checked according to Bandaram Pottaka.²³

Gift of 96 Sheep

The eighth inscription of Rajendra Chola I issued in his 8th regnal year 1020 C.E. found on the north wall of the Kizhur, Veerataneswarar temple refers to the gift of 96 sheep to the principal deity to feed.²⁴

Gift of Gold

The ninth inscription of Rajendra Chola I issued in his 9th regnal year 1021 C.E. found on the north wall of the Kizhur, Veerataneswarar temple refers to the gift of 5 kazhanju gold and the responsibility of giving one palam turmeric and one palam mulai was entrusted to three people.²⁵

Made a Donation

Tenth inscription of Rajendra Chola I issued in his 11th regnal year 1023 C.E. found on the south wall of the sanctorum in Kizhur, Veerataneswarar temple refers to Mudikonda Chola named Rama Maravadiyan donated - don't know what the donation was.²⁶

Gift of Land

Final inscription of Rajendra Chola I issued in his 15th regnal year 1027 C.E. found on the north wall of the Kizhur, Veerataneswarar temple refers to gave a lamp and a land donation to Thirukoolur Tiruveerattanathalwar to burn a Nanda lamp (to burn with cotton wool every day) by Ganavathy Mayiladi wife of Uttamachola Miladudiyar.²⁷

Conclusion

The foregoing study reveals the fact that the temples received immense patronage from the Rulers, who showed keen interest in documenting history through inscriptions and are very well known. Temples, being storehouses of historic treasures, also preserve several surprises and distinctive facts to be unearthed. The endowments of Keezhur Veerataneswarar Temple, as elucidated through the inscriptions of Rajendra Chola I, provide invaluable insights into the rich cultural and religious landscape of ancient South India. The inscriptions not only serve as a historical record but also highlight the significant role played by Rajendra Chola I in the temple's patronage and development. Rajendra Chola I's inscriptions reveal a deep commitment to the preservation and enhancement of the religious and cultural heritage embodied by Keezhur Veerataneswarar Temple.

The endowments made by the Chola king encompassed various resources, including lands, cattle, and other assets, aimed at ensuring the sustained prosperity and functioning of the temple. These endowments signify a symbiotic relationship between the ruling power and religious institutions during the Chola dynasty. Rajendra Chola I's patronage not only contributed to the economic sustenance of the temple but also strengthened its position as a cultural and spiritual center within the region. Furthermore, the inscriptions shed light on the religious practices, rituals, and administrative structures of the temple during Rajendra Chola I's reign. The king's meticulous attention to detail in the endowment grants reflects a sophisticated understanding of the temple's significance in the societal fabric. The endowments of Keezhur Veerataneswarar Temple, as documented in the inscriptions of Rajendra Chola I, exemplify a harmonious synergy between political authority and religious institutions in ancient South India. These inscriptions not only contribute to our historical understanding but also underscore the enduring legacy of the Chola dynasty's commitment to the promotion and preservation of cultural and religious heritage.

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