



ROLE OF BRAHMINS IN VIRUDHUNAGAR DISTRICT

(6th - 16th CAD) -A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The period between the Sixth Century and Sixteenth Century A.D. witnessed a changed scenario in social set up of Tamil Nadu. Caste hierarchy prevailed in the society. The Most distinctive feature of the Tamil caste system was the predominance of the Brahmin community. Along with the traditional castes, new castes also emerged. The developments of this period had a remarkable effect on the sociological set-up in the later ages. Though the society had many divisions, they co-existed peacefully.

KEYWORDS: *Brahmins, Caste, Social disparity, Sub caste, social unrest*

The period between the Sixth Century and Sixteenth Century A.D. witnessed a changed scenario in social set up of Tamil Nadu. Caste hierarchy prevailed in the society. The Most distinctive feature of the Tamil caste system was the predominance of the Brahmin community. Along with the traditional castes, new castes also emerged. The developments of this period had a remarkable effect on the sociological set-up in the later ages. Though the society had many divisions, they co-existed peacefully.

THE BRAHMINS

From the Sangam period onwards Brahmins played a vital role in the society. As they got patronage from the kings and the wealthy community, the Brahmins obtained a monopoly of conducting religious rituals including vestitue during coronations. The reson for the special privileges enjoyed by the Brahmins might be due to the desire of the rules to secure religious legitimisation of their status through the Brahimins. Their services were needed in the performance of Sacrifices like Asvameda and Vajpeypa¹



As protectors of varnashrama dharma the rulers upheld the caste system. Brahmins who were in the upper-hierarchy in the caste system enjoyed royal patronage. Fertile lands in the river banks were donated to the Brahmins as brahmadeyas. The Brahmins also had a direct and full benefit from the devadanas too, because of their crucial role in the affairs of the temple.² Hence the Brahmin as landholder became an important phenomenon in the medieval period. The domination of the Brahmins affected the whole social set up.

BRAHMADEYAS

Land donations to the Brahmins were known as brahmadeya lands. The brahmadeya settlements were usually tax free villages (iraiyali) created by ruling families and their subordinate authorities for the religious merit that it conferred on the founder. Occasionally a whole village was donated to the learned Brahmins without any taxes. They were given to individuals or group of Brahmins.³ A brahmadeya village shared among the Brahmins was called Attaham.⁴ Brahmin villages of this period were referred by a variety of terms such as Brahmadeya, Chathuvedimangalam, Agraharam, Agarabrahmadeya, Agara Brahmadesa, Brahmadesam, Brahmapui and Brahmamangalam.⁵

PROCEDURE FOR THE CREATION OF BRAHMADEYAS

The concept of Brahmadeya is derived from Dharmasastras. The Brahmins villages were unique centres of civilisation moulding the culture of peasantry around them. The brahmadeyas were given to the learned Brahmins as an honour.⁶

COMPOSITION OF BRAHMADEYAS

Brahmadeyas were located in fertile irrigated tracts. Apart from the riverline basins, these institutions were found more thinly scattered over large tracts of less productive land too. Thus they became influential community in the political, social and economic spheres.⁷

The Brahmadeya settlements were created mainly on the banks of the rivers. Though Virudhunagar District does not have any perennial river, the Vaippar, Arjunanadi and Gunda constitute the river network of the district, Vaippar flows through the southern part, Arjunandi covers the central part and Gunda irrigates North-Eastern part of Virudhunagar District. So the Pandya kings, when granting brahmadeyas were aware of the need of irrigation facilities. Hence the brahmadeyas were created near the waterbodies and they took many efforts to improve the irrigation sources.



In Virudhunagar District Virudhunagar Taluk, Kariapatti Taluk and Aruppukottai Taluk had no brahmadeyas because these three taluks were very dry and non-fertile region.

In Sattur Taluk brahmadeyas were located in Kulasekaapum and Irukkankudi. Irukkankudi is located on the banks of river Vaipar. Kulasekarapuram is located on the banks of Vijayanadi (river). Sivakasi Taluk brahmadeyas were Mangalam, Tiruttangal, Injar, Pudukkottai and Nadikudi. Mangalam brahmadeya was located on the banks of river Arjunanadhi. Nadikudi is located on the banks of the river Kalakudi. Tiruchuli Taluk Pallimadam brahmadeya was located on the banks of river Gundar. Rajapalayam Taluk brahmadeyas were located in Nakkaneri, Cholapum, Chakkaneri, Venganallur (Terku), Kollamkondan and Solacheri. All of them were situated on the banks of the river Sevalaperi. Srivilliputtur Mallinattu brahmadeya was in rainfed area.

To solve the problem during scarcity of water, the Pandya rulers dug many ponds and lakes. North-East of Srivilliputtur had the water resources from the tanks Senkulam and Athikulam. In the south-East region the irrigational sources were Rajakula Rayapei Kanmai and Thirupakadalkulam, Vadamalaikurichi kanmai and Mattappithan kanmai.⁸ Apart from this, the Srivilliputtur inscriptions mention about Paranusapereri. It was created in the name of the Pandyan king Arikesari Parangus Maravarman (624-672 A.D.). It was the biggest and oldest tank in Srivilliputtur.⁹ Srivilliputtur has many water resources in the form of tanks. Hence Srivilliputtur was created as a brahmadeyas with a Mahasabha for administration.

The planting of Brahmin settlement was started by the First Pandyas. It was followed by the successive rules. However its number increased during the Second Pandyan Empire. They patronised and gave support to the Brahmins. The name brahmadeyas also changed according to the wishes of the rulers. For example Chola brahmadeya was called as Uttama Chola Chathuvedi mangalam during the reign of Kulottunga II (1070-1120 A.D.). It was renamed as Sundara Pandya Chaathurvedimangalam during the reign of Sundara Pandya alias Manabaran (1104-1131 A.D) the Medieval Pandya ruler.

Though the Brahmins were few, due to the patronage of the rulers they accumulated rich and fertile lands. The Brahmadeyas as gifts from Kings, as centre of art and learning and as modes of agricultural development, were central institutions in Medieval Tamil society



according to David Ludden.¹⁰

SABHA

The brahminical villages were administered by the committee of brahmins known as Sabha. When the rulers donated a whole village to the Brahmins if that was a non-brahmin village, it was converted into a brahmadeya village and the administrative system also changed. When the village was converted into a brahmadeya. If a part of the non-brahmin village was donated to the Brahmins, both the administrative bodies Sabha and Ur (non-brahmin administrative organ) co-existed in the same village.¹¹

OTHER PROFESSIONS OF THE BRAHMINS

MINISTERS

The Brahmins acted as chief-ministers too. They had the title Uttaramantri. Highly educated Brahmins were naturally appointed as Chief ministers. It is to be noted that throughout the period of study Uttaramantris were appointed by the successive rulers. They were appointed from Virudhunaga region also is a fact to note. Sivakasi Copper Plates refer Tennavan Uttaramantri alias Iyakka Selva.¹² Early Pandya inscription at Kallumadai mentions about uttaramantriyana Nakkam Kanavathi.¹³ Later Pandya inscription at Narikudi mentions about Paruthikudi Nattu Tiruchuliyal Piralaya Vidanganana Tennavan Uttaramantri.¹⁴

GENERALS

According to the sastras the Brahmins were not to be a warrior, normally they must be only a priest, prophet and teacher as one who performed sacrifices. respectable Brahmins orthodox would not think of non-traditional professions. If one chose his profession as a warrior, he was treated as second grade Brahmin.

The Brahmins who rendered military service were known as Brahmadirayas or Brahmadirayas served as generals in the army.¹⁵ Early Pandya inscriptions at Kallumadai mention Uthaavidanga-Brahmadirayanana Uttama Pandyan¹⁶ Cholanthalaikonda Vira Pandya's Pallimadam inscription mentions Brahmarayanana Narayana Sri Madava.¹⁷ Maravarman Sundara Pandya II's Aviyur inscription mentions Raja Narayana Brahmadirayan.¹⁸ Later Pandya's inscription at Narikudi mentions about Brahmarayan.¹⁹ Parakrama Pandya's Devadanam inscription refers Pandya Brahmadirayanana Surya Pattan.²⁰



Thus from the Early region to that of the Thenkasi Pandyas, the Brahmins served as generals of the Pandyas.

ROLE OF BRAHMINS IN RELIGION

Brahmins obtained a monopoly of conducting rituals including vestiture during coronations. Vira Pandya's coronation ceremony at Tamilkkudal (Madurai) was conducted by the Vedic Scholar Vasudeva Pitambaran Bhattan.²¹ Apart from this, those who were included in the committee of priests in Siva temple were called Panchachariyan and those in the Vishnu temple were called Mulaparushaiyar. Maravarman Sundara Pandya I's Aruppukottai inscription mentions about Panchachariyan²². Kulottunga I's Tiruttangal Ninra Narayana Perumal temple inscription mentions about Mulaparushaiya.²³ The priest in the temple was selected as devakanmins through elected bodies. The word devakanmis is mentioned in the Later Pandya inscriptions at Sengunrapuram²⁴. Devakanmins means the servants of god. The duty of Devakanmin was to administer the temple. The Devakanmis were of two groups.

Devakanmis in Siva temple were called Aticantesvaa Nayana Devakanmis

Devakanmis in Vishnu temple were called Alvar Devakanmis.²⁵

Ur and Sabha gave land to the Battars in the name of Maniyampatta vrithi as to the orders of the ruling king. Sometimes the battars got a house and a garden also²⁶. Maravarman Sundara Pandya I's inscription at Injar mentions that the king granted iraiyili lands to the Battars through royal-order²⁷ Ponnin Perumal Parakrma Pandya's Devadanam inscription mentioned "from here the king gave iraiyili land grant to the Karivalamvantha Nallur Devakanmi Suryabattan.²⁸ Senbaga Pandyan alias ViraPandya's Nachadaithavirtha Nayanar temple inscription at Seithur mentions the Battars got house, garden and land in the name of Maniyam bhatta vrithi²⁹. Taxes were levied upon the iraiyili lands in the name of Brahmana Rasakkanam³⁰.

INFLUENTIAL ROLE OF BRAHMINS IN THE TEMPLE

Though the Brahmins served as priests in the temple, they too donated to the temples for its proper functioning. Srivallabha's inscriptions at Tiruttangal mention that Srivaishnavas and Si Pandaams provided neradamai and kasukadamai to Ninra Narayana Perumal Temple³¹. Koneinmaikondans inscription at Cholapuram Venkatachalapathy Temple mentions Periya Jiyar and Ilaiya Jiyar donated devadana and Brahmadeya land to the temple³². Another



inscription of the Pandyas at Cholapuram mentions Venkatachalapathy temple Pandarikal donated land to the temple.³³

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Brahmins involved in educational activities also. The Brahmins got Pulamai Vritti title for their knowledge in Vedas and Sastras. Brahmins, who were generally well versed in the Epic and Puranas were engaged in propounding the religious literatures in the temple mandapas. Sundara Pandya I's inscription at Cholapuram records a gift of land by the Nagarattar of Semmaram alias Kulasekarapuram to Tiruvudaiyan Devan alias Pittal Serakonar of the place as Pulamaivritti for his scholarship³⁴. Srivilliputtur inscription of Koneinmaikondan refers the gift of land made for expounding Ramayana and Mahabharatha in the temple³⁵ Tiruttangal inscription records a gift of land by Tiruvaranga devan - Kundeduthan and Tiruvaranga-devan-Uyyakolvan for the reading of Mahabharatha, Ramayana and the Puranas in Tiruvaranga devan Thirmandapa of Ninranarayana Perumal Temple at Tiruttangal built by them.³⁶

In short the Brahmins had a direct and full benefit from the Brahmadeyas and partial and indirect benefit from the devadanas, because of their crucial role in the affairs of the temple. Among the 434 inscriptions available in Virudhunagar district, 73 inscriptions mention directly or indirectly about the Brahmins. Since the inscriptions are mainly donative in nature and the Brahmins were mainly associated with the temples, vast references are available about them when compared to other people in the caste hierarchy.

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¹⁰ David Ludden. **Early Capitalism and Local History** in South India, New Delhi, 2005, p.36.

¹¹ C. Manoranjithamoni, **History of Tamil NADU UPTO 1565 A.D.**, Tiruvelveli, 2012, p. 393.

¹² Pandyar Cheppedugal Pattu, Sivakasi Copper Plates, Verse:- 73.

¹³ V.D.I. Vol. I, No. 203/2005.

¹⁴ V.D.I. Vol. I, No. 212/2005.

In the copper plates the Chief ministers are referred as uttaamantri but the inscription referred them as uttiranmantri.

¹⁵ A.R.E. No. 554 of 1916.

¹⁶ V.D.I. Vol. I, No. 203/2005.

¹⁷ V.D.I. Vol. I, No. 198/2005, A.R.E. No. 421 of 1914, and S.I.I. Vol. XIV, No.80.

¹⁸ V.D.I. Vol. I, No. 246/2005.

¹⁹ V.D.I. Vol. I, No. 211/2005.

²⁰ V.D.I. Vol. I, No. 348/2005.

²¹ Pandyar Cheppedugal Pattu, Sivakasi Copper Plates, Verses: 52-55

²² V.D.I. Vol. I, No. 127/2005.

²³ V.D.I. Vol. II, No. 225/2005, and A.R.E. No. 564 of 2005

²⁴ V.D.I. Vol. I, No. 321 and 313/2005.

²⁵ K.G.Krishnan, Inscriptions of the Early Pandyas (from C.300 B.C. to 984 A.D.), **op.cit**, p. 102.

²⁶ K.Thangavelu, **Tamilaha Samuga Panpattu Vaalaru**, (Tamil), Vol. I, Chennai, 2008, p.301.

²⁷ V.D.I. Vol. II, No. 293/2005.

²⁸ V.D.I. Vol. II, No. 348/2005.

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³⁰ Tamilnadu Varalarukulu, **Pallvar-Pandiyar kalam, Part I**, (Tamil), Vol. I, Tanjavu, 1990,



p.77.

³¹ The taxes paid in the form of paddy was called Nerkadamai. The taxes paid in the form of cash was called kasukadamai.

Vide: V.D.I. Vol. II, No. 246/2005 and A.R.E. No. 555 of 1922.

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³⁶ V.D.I. Vol. II, No. 238/2005 A.R.E. No. 546 of 1922.